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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS

IN THE KNOW

Black Nazarene carved in Mexico

THE BLACK NAZARENE HAS BEEN HOUSED AT THE SAINT John de Baptist Church in Quiapo, Manila, since 1787.

The life-size statue was brought to Manila from Mexico by a Spanish priest in 1607 and was said to have survived a fire while aboard the ship. The image was charred but was preserved, which explains its color.

It has also survived fires that engulfed the church in 1791 and 1929, the great earthquakes of 1645 and 1863, and the 1945 bombing of Manila during World War II.

Filipino Catholic devotees have attributed miracles and answered prayers to the Black Nazarene, and the number of devotees continues to swell.

BLACK/ A4

HOMAGE Cardinal Gaudencio Rosales (left) celebrates the Mass to mark the feast of the black image of Jesus Christ at the Quirino Grandstand in the Luneta on Friday before the start of the annual procession to the Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene in Quiapo Church through the streets of Manila which are clogged by devotees (right) trying to get as close as possible to the miraculous, 400-year-old burnt image of Jesus brought here in early 17th century.

FAITH OF THE FILIPINO

Gonzalez hit for freeing Chinese in drug trial

ZAMBOANGA CITY—IT APpears that the case of the "Bilibing Boys" was not the first drug case that saw the intervention of the Department of Justice.

Senior Supt. Adzhar Alhasi, director of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency in Western Mindanao, yesterday said the DOJ also intervened in the case of Lucky Ong, one of two Chinese nationals arrested here in connection with the raid on a shabu laboratory last year.

Ong was released in November when Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez ordered his name removed from the charge sheet, according to Alhasi.

Ong's purported associates, Wang Li Yang, Rudyard Payuan, Israel Daanoi and Edgar Raco, remained behind bars.

Contacted for comment in

GONZALEZ/ A6

SLAIN IN THE HEAT OF FERVOR A devotee is carried out of harm's way after collapsing at the start of the procession. NOEL ALCASID

Retired generals rally behind PDEA

By Jocelyn R. Uy

RETIRED GENERALS AND FLAG OFFIcers of the Armed Forces are backing the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) and its director general, Dionisio Santiago, for enforcing drug laws "without fear or favor."

Mixed in a bribery controversy involving a drug case against the so-called "Bilibing Boys," the PDEA must be given strong support for continuing to do its mandated duties well, the Association of Generals and Flag Officers Inc. (Agfo) said in a resolution.

The Agfo board of directors approved the resolution on Wednesday, a day after Santiago and Maj. Ferdinand Marcelino, head of the PDEA's Special Enforcement Service, confessed during an inquiry by

RETIRED/ A5

'Nazarene procession longest ever'

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr., Kristine L. Alave, Jeannette I. Andrade and Marlon Ramos

THEY MAY HAVE LOST MANY things in life—their health, their jobs, even their businesses—but not their faith.

And so, for one frenzied day marked by what a prelate called "fanaticism," they came by the hundreds of thousands to pay homage to the Black Nazarene that many believe can deliver miracles.

Amid a global financial crisis that could affect their country crowds of devotees generously estimated by the police at between 1 and 3 million yesterday jostled, surged and swarmed around the centuries-old image to offer thanks and prayers in what organizers said was the longest procession they could remember.

Some people even lifted cars or tried to push away a fire truck to get close to the Nazarene, police said.

For the first time, police also said, the religious figure was fitted with a global positioning satellite device to make it eas-

NATIV/ A4

PNP prefers whistle-blowers to warning shots

By Tarra Quismundo

DON'T SHOOT, JUST SHOUT.

When confronted by a scuffle or a fleeing suspect, policemen are no longer allowed to fire warning shots, according to an order issued by the Philippine National Police in response to criticisms against the force because of civilians being hurt in police operations.

As he marked his first 100 days in the post, PNP chief Director General Jesus Verzosa yesterday reiterated an existing policy against firing warning shots.

PNP PREFERS/ A4

Pinoys back home from hell of Gaza

By Noel Velasco in Bangkok and Mike Navales in Manila

"BOMBS WERE EXPLODING EVERYwhere everyday ... It was frightening ... There was nowhere to hide."

That was how some of 16 Filipino evacuees described the situation in war-torn Gaza as they fled to safety to avoid Israeli bombardment.

PINOYS/ A6

HOME FROM THE WARFRONT Three Filipino women married to Palestinians and their 13 children arrive here Friday night from Amman, Jordan via Bangkok. EDGAR PANGILINAN

Ping: Open up bicam sessions on '09 budget

By Michael Lim Ubac

OPPOSITION SEN. PANFILO LACSON yesterday said the proceedings of the bicameral conference on the proposed P1.4-trillion national budget for 2009 should be opened to the public "so everyone will know where these appropriations will go."

He said the bicameral conference committee, which reconciles the House and

PING: OPEN/ A4

Israel, Hamas snub UN call for immediate ceasefire

JERUSALEM—THE UN SECURIty Council called for an "immediate" and "durable" ceasefire in Gaza, but an intense bombardment of rubbles from Israeli jets and helicopters early Friday and a barrage of Hamas rockets indicated there would be no rapid end to the fighting.

A Hamas spokesperson said the Islamic militant group "is not interested" in the ceasefire because it was not consulted and the resolution did not meet its minimum demands. Israel's top leaders were set Friday to discuss the ceasefire—or a possible expansion of the ground offensive.

One Israeli air strike killed two Hamas militants and another unidentified man, while another flattened a five-story building in northern Gaza, killing at least seven people, including an infant. Hamas security officials said. By mid-morning 15 Palestinians had been killed.

In all, Israeli aircraft struck more than 30 targets before dawn, and constant explosions continued after first light. Friday's deaths in Gaza pushed the Palestinian death toll to about 780 in the near two-week conflict, at least half of them civilians, according to Gaza health officials. Thirteen Israelis have

ISRAEL/ A4

Second FRONTPAGE

WEATHER FORECAST

Baguio	Partly Cloudy	Iloilo	Mostly Cloudy
Tuguegarao	Partly Cloudy	Cebu	Mostly Cloudy
Laoag	Partly Cloudy	Tacloban	Mostly Cloudy
Metro Manila	Mostly Cloudy	Zamboanga	Partly Cloudy
Legaspi	Mostly Cloudy	Cagayan de Oro	Partly Cloudy
Palawan	Partly Cloudy	Davao	Partly Cloudy

EZ2 2D 22 2 10 23
SUERTRES 3D 3 5 7
4D 5 5 2
FOUR DIGIT 1ST 4 5 5 6 2ND 7 9 3
MEGALOTTO 6/45 5 30 36 35 39 42
P5,175,959.40

GMA: Still no to death penalty

By TJ Burgonio, Gil Cabacungan Jr. and Christine Avendaño

PRESIDENT MACAPAGAL-ARROYO IS STICKING BY HER POLICY on capital punishment even as moves to reimpose the death penalty gained support in Congress amid the public furor over the bribery-tainted dismissal of drug charges against three young men from influential families.

"The President has always stood by the mind of the Church, which is against the imposition of the death penalty," said Secretary Gorge Bermudez.

But Malacañang was not closing its door on public debates to revive the death penalty to deal with big-time drug traffickers, said Bermudez, head of the Presidential Management Staff.

"We will listen to the discussions if this is tackled in the appropriate forum. However, there are those who still believe that the death penalty is not the answer to heinous crimes, such as drug trafficking," he said.

Mandaluyong Rep. Rolly Biazon said he would file a bill seeking to restore capital punishment for drug traffickers.

Revival of bill

In the Senate, Senate Majority Leader Miguel Zubiri said he would push for the revival of a bill that he filed seven months ago seeking the re-imposition of the death penalty on heinous crimes like drug trafficking and multiple murders.

The issue of reimposing the death penalty has been revived following the incident involving the three young men known as the "Alabang Boys," who were arrested by agents of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency in a buy-bust operation last September, but whose case was dismissed by the justice department under highly controversial circumstances.

PDEA agents claimed that prosecutors at the Department of Justice were bribed into dismissing the case against Richard Brodett, Anjo Joseph and Joseph Resnet, called the "Alabang Boys" because two of them are residents of village enclaves in Alabang, Muntinlupa.

The 1987 Constitution abolished capital punishment but Congress reimposed it on Jan. 1, 1993. But in 2006, on the eve of Mrs Arroyo's visit to the Vatican, Congress repealed the Death Penalty Law as well as the 1998 unconsidered prescribing death by lethal injection for those convicted of heinous crimes.

Act of self-defense

Dangerous Drugs Board chair Vicente Sotto III said he would submit his proposal of the death penalty for drug traffickers to Congress for debate.

"It is an act of self-defense for society and the victims' families," he said.

Bermudez said that Sotto and Cebu Rep. Antonio Cuenco, authors of the law that created the PDEA, were looking at reviving their original proposal to give the DDB or PDEA prosecutorial powers.

"What they're saying is lack of cooperation and coordination between and among enforcement, prosecution and even judiciary. Their original proposal is that within the DDB and PDEA system will be divisions including enforcement, prosecution and rehabilitation," he said.

House Speaker Prospero Nograles said if the House committee on drug abuse and dangerous drugs endorses the proposal to revive the death penalty, he would support it.

Gov't predicts 'escalation of violence' by NPA rebs

By TJ Burgonio

THE GOVERNMENT EXPECTS AN "escalation of violence" from communist rebels, but the military is confident it can crush the enemy by the time President Macapagal-Arroyo ends her term in 2010, Secretary of Security adviser Norberto Gonzales said yesterday.

The National Security Council has recorded 60 killings in 2008—including 20 civilians suspected to be government agents—attributed to the New People's Army. Gonzales told a press forum yesterday: "They (the rebels) are strengthening their hold in areas where they hold influence."

While the rebel group reacted in a position to topple the government, the authorities were expecting their operations to ongoing, he added.

Armed Forces chief Gen. Alexander Yano assured the President the other day that the military would crush the insurgency by 2010.

Malacañang quieted fears as restarting Mr Arroyo's almost the AFP's "readiness to abide by Her Excellency's deadline to reduce insurgency to an insignificant level by 2010."

The AFP held its first command conference at Malacañang's Heroes' Hall Thursday night, but this was not open to the media.

Mr Arroyo had said last December that the insurgency would be wiped out by 2010 since the guerrilla group had been cut down by half from 12,000 in 2001 and was now a "low-level threat."

Gonzales, who was present at the conference, said the government should go beyond winning the war to ending the insurgency.

"We have to remind ourselves that our promise is not to win communism by this year. What we want is to end armed rebellion. And we have 14 to 16 months left to make good that commitment," he said at the forum.

Gonzales said that part of the strategy was to change the government's mindset that poverty is the root cause of insurgency and that all efforts should be geared toward ending it.

Irri warns of rice price hike

RICE PRICES ARE LIKELY TO RISE despite for the second straight year in 2009 as the global economic downturn hits farmers and consumers alike, the International Rice Research Institute warned yesterday.

The worldwide credit crunch will make it hard for farmers to secure cash to purchase essentials such as seeds and fertilizer, the Philippines-based body said in the latest edition of its quarterly journal "Rice Today."

At the same time, it added, the economic downturn may increase demand for rice in developing nations as falling income forces poor people to switch back to less expensive staples.

The price of rice—a staple food for half the world including nearly 700 million poor Asians—spiked to $1,000 a ton last April, triggering fears of social unrest.

It slid to about $570 in months later due to record production and the early effects of the economic slowdown.

However, the institute warned, "production uncertainty due to high fertilizer and fuel prices combined with strong demand growth points to another rise in rice prices in the coming months.

"Price volatility will remain high."

Even if they had the cash, farmers turned by the soldier plunge in commodity prices "will likely play safe and reduce input for their 2009 crops," IRRI

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Everest summiteers eye Kota Kinabalu rock face

By Alexis Pupa

AFTER KNOCKING OFF THE WORLD'S highest mountain, the Philippine Everest Team is set to climb the world's highest "via ferrata" in Mt. Kinabalu in Sabah, Malaysia.

In a press conference in Manila yesterday, Philippine Everest Team leader Art Valdez said the team is slated to climb Mountain Tenji soon on Mt. Kinabalu National Park on Jan. 11 and 12.

Mt. Kinabalu towers at 4,095 meters above sea level.

Mountain Tenji is the highest "via ferrata" in the world and has a pure granite face. It begins at 3,400 meters and ends at 3,800 meters above sea level. It includes a 22 meter knee bridge suspended at 3,600 meters above sea level.

A "via ferrata," which means "iron road" in Italian, is a cautionary mountain path, consisting of steel rungs, rails and cables already embedded into the rock face. It opens up routes to average climbers which were only available to expert mountaineers with special equipment.

A "via ferrata" gives climbers the thrill of mountain climbing in complete safety together with spectacular mountain views.

"We've conquered the highest mountain. Why not Mountain Tenji—the world's highest via ferrata?" Valdez said.

He added that this would be the first time the team would climb a "via ferrata."

"Although Mt. Kinabalu obviously has a much shorter distance than Mt. Everest, we should treat each mountain with reverence. Ika-six, Kinabalu is our all-granite rock face... it will be a completely different experience for us," said team members Jonas Debuenios Jardeleza.

In 2006, Philippine Everest Team members Leo Oracion and Ronnie "Pastor" Evasco raised Mt. Everest.

In 2007, Sembrano, together with team members Karina Bagwaden and Noelle Wenceslao, were the first Asian women to reach the peak of Mt. Everest.

The only other Filipino credited with scaling Mt. Everest is Romeo Cantinez, who died in a day after Oracion died.

Besides Valdez and Sembrano, other members of the team climbing Mountain Tenji include Dr. Ted Baguyos, the team's physician; Bayocabo; Fred Jarrell and Evasco.

The climb is sponsored by Shell International Travel Cats Inc. with Malaysian partners Mountain Tanji, Sinotrek Malaysia and Imbak Trackers.

Mar Roxas still playing coy

By Christine D. Avendaño

STILL PLAYING COY, PERHAPS, BAUER for Sen. Mar Roxas yesterday remained evasive about his political as well as marriage plans with longtime girlfriend, broadcast journalist Korina Sanchez, except to say that announcements would be made "within the year."

Roxas, president of the Liberal Party and widely believed to be a contender for the presidency in 2010, remained silent when asked by reporters about his plans for the future at a lunch held yesterday at the party's new clubhouse.

"Ang pasa lang ai 2009 ang mahalaga(only)," (Only the future and God knows), he told reporters. "There is a right time for all of these."

Pressed for a more definite date frame, he admitted that he and Sanchez, his girlfriend of five years, had been talking about getting married, but stopped short of announcing the date. "You'll know within the year," he added.

The 49-year-old senator later disclosed that he and Sanchez spent Christmas and the New Year together.

When some reporters suggested a double wedding together with Sen. Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III, another elusive bachelor, he shot back: "Ang gusto ko, dapat lalong arawan na yan kay Bro (my wish is that it would be on Bro's birthday)." (I want that special day to be for Bro's birthday.)

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Faith of the Filipino: Longest Nazarene procession

From page A1

ar to track. Altogether, the police deployed 1,500 officers policemen around the grandstand and along the procession to keep the peace.

Unlike last year when two people were trampled to death, no fatalities were reported yesterday. But a total of 207 people were treated for various injuries, the Red Cross and the police said.

Why Filipinos adore Him

The procession began at the foot of the Quirino Grandstand at 9 a.m. As usual, 9:13 p.m., more than 12 hours later, the Nazarene finally entered Quiapo Church, its destination.

Many of the devotees came barefoot. They included a few politicians.

His star apparently noticed a 5.1 magnitude earthquake that hit Luzon and parts of Metro Manila at 3:29 p.m., when the procession was in its height.

In his homily during Misa pro-coding the procession, Manila Archbishop Gaudencio Cardinal Rosales explained why Filipinos love the image of the kneeling, blackened Christ burdened with sorrow.

"The image of Christ as the Black Nazarene is not a great king riding a carriage. He walks barefoot as Filipinos adore Him because they see themselves in Him," Rosales said.

"Filipinos are burdened with problems. Christ shows that He is with you in your problems," he added.

Also like Christ's, the needs and ambitions of the ordinary Filipinos "are simple," Rosales said.

Solemnity lost

But the solemnity of the Black was marred by a commotion midway through Rosales' homily.

Devotees shoved their way forward to get close to the Nazarene, breaking the barrier of marshals. Others, clad in the Nazarene's colors of gold and maroon, also rushed in to grab the rear long, thick ropes used to pull the carriage carrying the image.

Rosales continued with his homily, but he later had to stop when it appeared that the crowd was not listening anymore and was intent on getting close to the religious icon.

Vice President Noli de Castro, a Nazarene devotee, and National Capital Region chief Director Leopoldo Bataoil had to go down the pandemonium to pacify the crowd.

Fanticism deplored

When the crowd refused to quiet down, a visibly annoyed Rosales sternly told them to turn their attention to the Man, saying: "We appeal to you to let us finish the Mass. Let us make this devotion orderly."

Rosales told reporters later he was disappointed at the crowd's "fanaticism."

"The small group that frantically climbed to get to the Lord, that's the example of what it should not be. That part has to be purified," Rosales said. "The emotions that (sparked) it, it should not be there and that's exactly what we are trying to tell the people."

Manila Police District director Chief Supt. Roberto Rosales said the number of those who joined and watched the procession peaked at 2 million in the afternoon. "Imagine the length of the roads covered with people." He said this did not include those watching near Quiapo Church.

Different prayers

Assessors of Sen. Manny Villar, which read "Pinipigyang Ilapanalangin Ninoy: Padre Jose Nanaroral Pinghati (Ninoy's wife Cory Aquino and Villar's wife Jocelyn) to Pinoy Miranda. Villar is widely believed to be planning to run for president in 2010.

Rumors of Manila vice mayor Lito Atienza and former Olympic Danny Lacuna were also seen.

Different people came with different prayers.

Forty-six year-old Emmanuel Fernandez, a father of five children, said he came because he hoped the Black Nazarene would help him find a better life.

"I am praying that He would help me in my small business," said Fernandez, who earns a small income in Las Piñas. He said the number one problem now for the schooling of his five children, two of whom would be in college soon.

"I have diabetes, a heart condition and ulcer but I know the Black Nazarene can cure me," said Sonia Ary 67, who travelled all the way from a northern province to get a glimpse of the Nazarene.

There were government officials like Naga City Mayor Jesse Robredo, who did not have any specific wishes.

A 2003 Ramon Magsaysay awardee for governance, Robredo was amazed by the passion of the devotees.

Healing powers

"If only this degree of faith translated into action ..." Robredo lamented.

Many devotees threw white towels and handkerchiefs to ride devotees on the carriage to wipe the statue in the hope of carrying away some of its healing powers.

Families cheered up together, like that of 56-year-old Bobby Dimaano, who are only brought with him his wife and three children, but also his first grandson Joshua, only 5 months old.

"I wanted to offer my first grandson to the Black Nazarene," said Dimaano, who had been joining the procession for 16 years.

Another devotee, Danny Jando, 47, said he had not missed a single procession in almost 40 years despite an illness that has impaired his ability to walk.

Dolores Hipolito, 52, had no wish. A nurse vendor, she earned a fortune yesterday selling shirts designed with the image of the Black Nazarene.

The procession took a longer route this year, taking earlier than the allays it used to pass through.

Rope pulling

Devotees waiting at the originally announced route were surprised when the carriage of the Nazarene did not show up.

A second one that swallows in the Quiapo area had "snatched" the statue by pulling the rope of the carriage towards the old route, diverting the procession.

Later, the procession was greatly

> *Black . . .*
>
> From page A1
>
> with every year.
>
> For some, the Black Nazarene is the Filipino version of Jesus Christ, because of the color of his skin. Many hard-up Filipinos could also relate to the image of Simon of Cyrene, who helped carry the weight of the Cross, according to the rector of the church. **Inquirer Research**

ed back to a part of the original route.

As the carriage neared Quiapo Church, people waved hands and chanted, "Viva Nazareno."

Some devotees, like businessman Ernesto Pichanick, 53, from Batangas, were so seeing the Nazarene.

Asked why the team, she said: "Last year, I failed to come near the Nazarene because I was hungry. My small-selling business always went bankrupt. Some members of my family got sick. I thought it was a sign from the Lord ... Now, after I saw him, I felt different. I know the Lord will shower me and my family with blessings this year."

PNP prefers whistle-blowers to warning shots

From page A1

He directed policemen to choose the safer option: Use a whistle, a megaphone or your loudest voice.

"Policemen are no longer authorized to fire warning shots because that's dangerous. We are revising our operational procedures to prevent civilian casualties," he told reporters in Camp Crame.

He said policemen should use the public address system in the patrol cars and in police motorcycles.

"That's really what should be done. The officer should shout: 'Stop!'" said Director Osmundo Dotta, the chief of police community relations.

Verzosa said this has been the standing policy for the past one or two years, and it continues to be disseminated to police units around the country.

Paraluman shootout

He said those violating the rules would be investigated, especially if a criminal case happens, like if the warning shot hits someone.

The PNP has faced increasing criticism for many operational lapses, the most serious of which was the death of six civilians in the Dec. 5 Paraluman shoot-out.

The PNP Internal Affairs Service said the police officers involved in the operation against a group of robbery suspects had failed in their mission as six civilians were among the 10 killed in the bloody encounter.

'Darkest stain'

Policemen figured in at least five other cases earlier against robbery suspects last month but no officers were here.

An internal probe of the Paraluman debacle recommended that nine officers of the PNP Highway Patrol Group be charged with administrative violations.

Verzosa said he considered the incident the darkest "stain" in his initial three-month stint at the PNP chief's post, even worse than the scandal involving a police delegation caught with $35,000 cash in Singapore's Changi Airport in November last. Dozens, which prompted a Senate probe.

He said the PNP has begun studying its rules of engagement after the 161 findings on the Dec. 5 shoot-out.

He said the Paraluman mission was "a very good accomplishment, but it was overshadowed by an unfortunate incident because civilians were involved."

"There were lapses among the operating elements in terms of procedure ... civilians were killed. It's a very big thing, what happened was very complex."

Ping: Open up bicam sessions on budget

From page A1

Senate versions of the budget, should convene as soon as possible to avoid the government's having to function on a rolled-over budget for the whole of 2009.

"Let us operate again on a reenacted budget, we must take steps to ensure the early signing of the national budget into law. Not only that, the entire process must be transparent to the public; will know where their money go," he said in a statement.

Since the start of the new year, the government has been operating on the FY 2,227 billion 2008 budget, which was automatically rolled over because of the failure of Congress to enact the 2009 budget before adjourning for the holiday break last December.

Congressional leaders vowed to reconcile the separate budget bills when Congress resumes session on Jan. 26. After approval by the bicam, the final copy of the bill will go to the Senate and House for ratification before being sent to President Macapagal-Arroyo for signing into law.

According to Lacson, during the bicam's very first meeting last month, the committee adopted his motion to make the proceedings public.

Bare all insertions

He said the bicam meetings should be "transparent and thorough, with all details of 'insertions' open to media and the public."

"This motion should be strictly followed. What would be the use if only a few members were involved, while are the purposes of these insertions and where will they be sourced from? All these should be made public in the name of transparency to avoid a repetition of the P200-million 'maid to nowhere' issue," the senator said.

The House has realigned P64 billion from the debt service allocation as a lump sum fund, but did not specifically say where these funds would go.

In the P4-trillion 2nd time the debt service, the Senate slashed another P30 billion, for a total of P34 billion. This was supposedly done to provide the government and the economy with a "stimulus fund" to weather the global financial crisis this year.

To prevent Malacañang from realigning the reenacted 2008 budget to its "pet projects" this year, Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile last proposed a special provision for the extraordinary effectivity of the 2009 budget on Jan. 1, once the bill is signed into law.

"This will render moot and academic whatever realignments they made during the period when the 2008 budget is not yet enacted. Malacañang will then adjust the budgetary disbursements accordingly," Enrile said.

Lacson urged legislators to fulfill their responsibility to participate actively and ensure transparency in the bicameral conference committee meetings.

He said the people would not tolerate a repeat of the "double entry" anomalies that were found in the national budget for 2008, where unidentified pots entries were allowed more than once in particular items or projects.

Lacson unearthed the alleged double insertion of P500 million in the 2008 budget for the C5 road extension project which he said benefited the property development business of then Senate President Manuel Villar. The controversy led to the Senate coup last November that ousted Villar and installed Enrile as Senate President.

Lacson is known for his particular scrutiny the Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF), also known as the pork barrel, a lump sum fund which has become a source of kickbacks for lawmakers.

The proposed 2009 budget has retained the P500-million PDAF allocation for each senator and P70 million for each of the 250 House members.

Lacson said the President's office also has its share of pork barrel, which "can't be quantified," most of it tucked in budgetary allocations of line agencies.

He said special purpose funds can be "classified as pork for the President," like the one listed under the Agricultural Fiduciary Modernization Act, with a funding of P37 billion.

He said all departments have special purpose funds and they are all at the disposal of the President.

"It's big. It can't be disbursed [by the department secretaries] without clearance from the President, such as the P720-million Fertilizer Fund," he said.

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. pressed for changing the legislative schedule on the annual national budget by requiring Malacañang to submit its budget proposal to Congress in January, instead of July or August.

Pimentel said the early submittal of the budget appropriations bill to Congress would do away with the perennial problem of delayed approval, resulting in the automatic roll-over of the previous year's budget.

"The problem is when the old budget is reenacted, the funds intended for projects are virtually converted into discretionary funds of the President, at least during the first quarter of the year," he said.

"Although there is nothing necessarily wrong with the automatic reenactment of the old budget, this gives the President too much leeway in spending public money to the extent that it becomes her path barrel that it is used for dispensing political favors," said Pimentel.

Retired generals rally behind PDEA

From page A1

the Finance committee on dangerous drugs that bribes were offered for the release of Richard Brodett, Joseph Terrero and Jorge Joseph.

The Agila resolution, a copy of which was made available yesterday to reporters at Camp Aguinaldo, was signed by retired Maj. Gen. Jose Maria Salapuddin and retired Brig. Gen. Jaime Echevarria, the Agila's corporate secretary and chair, respectively.

Even behind bars, former Marine Corps commandant Gen. Benito Ebuen Jr. urged his fellow Marines to rally behind Ebuenfino, 33.

"The kid deserves everyone's support. He is confronting one of the most difficult challenges. It's a fight between good and evil, and it has nothing to do with politics," Miranda told the reporters at the phone.

Miranda, who is facing coup charges along with other officers, said he was saddened that there were "hardly any efforts to arrive at the truth" in the killing of Marcelino.

"I pity the kid. This is the time that every one should unite and give him all our support," Miranda said.

The Alabang Boys were screened by Marcelino and other PDEA agents to buy-bust operations in Mandaluyong City and Quezon City on Sept. 20, 2008. The three were found carrying packets of fentanyl, residues of cocaine and packets of marijuana.

Marcelino, whom Santiago has described as "incorruptible," testified at the recent House inquiry that allies of P3 million to P20 million were made to him by parties related to Brodett, Joseph and Terrero in exchange for their release.

Santiago also testified that the Alabang Boys supplied illegal drugs to the Embassy Super Club in Tagaytay City and other high-end bars in Makati City and Quezon City. (The Embassy management denied this.)

And the Agila in its resolution: "Through the years, the PDEA has been scandalous in the performance of its duties, [and] in doing its mandated tasks, it has been subjected to a lot of humiliation and hardship, as well as disrepute to good name, by personnel.

"Patriotic and decent people should get out of their way to support a government agency that is performing its duties on the face of its abilities."

The retired generals and flag officers agreed to back President Macapagal-Arroyo, Vice President Noli de Castro, Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile and House Speaker Prospero Nograles copies of the resolution.

In an earlier TV interview, Marine Corps commandant Gen. Ben Dolorfino encouraged his men against backing Marcelino.

"My advice to them is to be professional about the matter. For us to the military, it is always the interests of the state above our own," Dolorfino said.

"If we have a personal opinion on the matter, then let us just keep it [to] ourselves. We cannot express it in public because it might be misinterpreted for something else that might put the military organization in a bad light," he said.

But according to Miranda, "speaking and upholding the truth is not about politics."

"Marcelino has to be appreciated and supported for his integrity, being a Marine officer. We must all be proud of him," Miranda said.

The Philippine Military Academy Battle Lips Class of 1994, to which Marcelino belongs, also expressed "steadfast support" for him, saying he had "always been a man of action and principle."

In a text e-mail to the reporters, the Battle Lips Class said Marcelino possessed "resolute spirit and determination to accomplish his duties and responsibilities with unimpeachable integrity."

"We admire his loyalty to God and country, as well as his courage to stand against what is morally wrong. We know his fight will not be an easy one, but we are a class still be there to support him in whatever legal means we can," the class said.

AFP Chief of Staff Gen. Alexander Yano offered advice to Marcelino when the latter visited Camp Aguinaldo yesterday.

According to military spokesperson Lt. Col. Ernesto Torres Jr., Yano invited Marcelino to his office for a brief conversation.

"During this [office] of the AFP, the chief of staff gave him advice, as he would to a soldier in a difficult situation," Torres said in recounting to reporters the 15-minute exchange between Yano and Marcelino.

Yano's advice, according to Torres, was for Marcelino to cover some of the side of truth, to preserve and maintain his moral courage and to focus the battle against groups with vested interests that might take advantage of him.

"The advice shows that the chief of staff appreciates Marcelino's moral courage," Torres said.

He said it was Yano's habit to offer guidance to junior officers embroiled in tough circumstances, and that Yano occasionally checks on the conditions of the detained Magdalo soldiers after mounted the Oakwood mutiny in 2003.

"Even if there are accusations against you, as long as you are part of the AFP, it is incumbent upon him to give advice and [to] do something about what is happening, especially now," Torres said, adding:

When asked by reporters on Thursday whether, as proposed by Sen. Rodolfo Biazon, the AFP would confer on Marcelino the Distinguished Service Star, the highest commendation award for a soldier, Yano said: "Not at this moment."

He said the conferment of the award had to go "through the proper channels." With report from Jocelin Bonilla, Inquirer Mindanao

PDEA major no-show

THE NATIONAL BUREAU OF Investigation was dismayed that Maj. Ferdinand Marcelino was still a no-show yesterday despite two subpoenas sent to him.

Marcelino was first invited to the Senate in the afternoon of Jan. 8 but he begged off because of a purported PDEA operation, according to Atty. Dominic Sy, head of the NBI special task force assigned to look into the bribery scandal.

"Now he called to say that he still couldn't come because he has a lot of commitments. When asked when he will be free, he couldn't give a definite time; he said he's not sure," Dominic told reporters.

"He were given only 30 days by Congress to finish our probe of the alleged bribery but how can we do that if these people are unresponsive? How can we establish that there was indeed a bribery when they don't speak up? Who will we prosecute?" he said. Tina G. Santos

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Thousands join Black Nazarene procession in Cagayan de Oro

By Ma. Cecilia Rodriguez
Inquirer Mindanao

CAGAYAN DE ORO CITY—Thousands of human Catholic devotees from as far as Zamboanga, Butuan and Davao flocked here yesterday to join the procession of the Black Nazarene—believed to be the first time such an event was held in Mindanao.

Devotees walked barefoot from the Cathedral of Saint Agustin to the Macanhan Church, about 3 kilometers away.

Replica

In contrast to the simultaneous procession in Manila, the 6,000 devotees walked quietly, although shouts of "Viva Nazareno!" were heard occasionally.

A replica of the image of the Black Nazarene in Quiapo, Manila was flown here last week to give Mindanaons a chance to pay homage to Christ.

"Our original plan was to borrow just the clothes so we can use it for our own Black Nazarene image here. But Msgr. Jose Clemente Ignacio, the parish priest of the Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene (in Quiapo), told us they have decided to bring (the replica) here and make the Macanhan Church its permanent home," Msgr. Elmer Abucejo of the Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro said.

Archbishop Antonio Ledesma called the faithful: "Our devotion to Him may pave the way to peace in Mindanao."

Embattled prosecutors offer to quit task force

By Kristine L. Alave

FED UP WITH ALLEGATIONS that government prosecutors were bribed into dropping the cases against the "Maguindanao Boys," the members of the Department of Justice's Task Force on Anti-Illegal Drugs led by Chief Special Prosecutor Jovencito Zuño have offered to quit.

But Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez rejected the task force members' offer to resign, Zuño yesterday told reporters. "I refused it," he quoted Gonzalez as saying.

Zuño said he informed the justice secretary on Thursday that "till the task force members" unrelenting about 20 women) to resign and that "they don't want to handle drug cases anymore."

"They really cannot work under this cloud of suspicion, with all of these insinuations," he said.

Gonzalez confirmed Zuño's disclosure.

"I refused it," he said of the prosecutors' offer to quit, adding that the investigation of the bribery allegations should be allowed to run its course.

"I want (what) all the prosecutors still they are proven guilty," Gonzalez said.

Low morale

Zuño said the task force's morale was "low" and that its members were "disgusted" by the bribery accusations. "I want to ask my (co-)ones," he said.

He also said the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) were one in his accusations and that he had personally felt his self-esteem.

"They are out to destroy the criminal justice system and the DOJ prosecutors," he said.

Zuño challenged PDEA Director General Dionisio Santiago to name the prosecutors involved in the purported bribery to show that the accusations against them "are not just "peyorsi."

He also expressed disappointment at how the prosecutors were treated at the House of Representatives' inquiry into the bribery allegations.

He said they were not given enough of a chance to explain the case against the "Ampatuan Three" and its technicalities.

"We were there as resource persons. But I felt that (the hearing) was done for the PDEA," he said.

No more PDEA cases

Zuño said that if he had his way, he would not "have anything to do anymore with PDEA drug cases."

"I want to let them go," he said.

He added that he was willing to submit to an investigation by the Office of the Ombudsman to clear his name.

Gonzalez hit for freeing . . .

From page A1

Manila, Gonzalez said he could not remember a drug case concerning Lucky Dog.

"I don't know anything about that," he said on the phone, but admitted that an occasion he reviewed the findings of the prosecutors.

"If the prosecution is wrong, then I will not sign (the memorandum)," Gonzalez said.

In the remarks of the Ongcoys, he said: "I don't remember it."

Gonzalez said he would discuss the case with PDEA officials and that he would invite Albano to his office.

Zuño said he not complain to Gonzalez? We can discuss it on Monday," Gonzalez said.

During the trial

Albano said he and the prosecutors were surprised by Gonzalez's move and tried to appeal it, to no avail.

"At least in the (case of) the 60 drug lords, DDEA agents] were still in the stage of filing appropriate charges against the suspects in court. In our case here, it was at the height of the trial when the DOJ intervened," he said.

What made the ruling Albano said, was that the case was "progressing smoothly because of overwhelming evidence."

"But when we were about to conclude the case, the secretary of justice reversed the prosecutors' decisions and reinvented (the) wheel," he said.

Gonzalez did not agree with the findings of Western Mindanao prosecutor Ricardo Calanoy, according to Albano.

"That was what happened," he said, adding that they cited but failed to file a motion for reconsideration and opposition to court.

"We were all shocked when Ongcoy fired," Albano said.

Collaboration needed

In Manila, Philippine National Police Director General Jesus Versoza called for stronger collaboration among law enforcers, state lawyers and the community for the successful prosecution of drug cases.

Versoza issued the call in the course of refuting to the difficulties that the PDEA usually faces in bringing drug suspects to justice.

He said closer collaboration among the agencies involved in the fight against illegal drugs would show the government's will to stamp out the drug menace.

The PNP has not illegal drugs task forces or similar, provincial and regional levels undertaking operations to curb the drug problem and users.

"In the prosecution and investigation of drug cases, we really find hardships, problems pertaining to the presentation of witnesses and evidence. We have very close relationships between investigators, operatives, prosecutors and the witnesses," Versoza said reporters.

"We have to improve collaboration for the successful conduct of trial by the court of justice. Without it, no withdrawal of fort," he said. —Reports from Jaclu Alipatic in Zamboanga City, Kristine L. Alave and Tarra Quismundo in Manila

Israel, Hamas snub UN truce call

From page A1

died in the 13 days of fighting. Israel launched its assault in an attempt to halt years of rocket fire from the Hamas-controlled territory.

Hamas barrage

Despite the nearly two-weeks of Israel's devastating offensive, Hamas continued to bombard residents of southern Israel. Sunday, hit Friday morning in and around Beersheba and Ashkelon, Israeli—like other cities in Israel's south—have largely been paralyzed since the fighting began on Dec. 27.

Israel called up thousands of reserve troops earlier in the week, and they are now ready for action.

The Security Council action came hours after 105 agencies suspended food deliveries to Gaza, and the Red Cross announced that all trucking work and assistance after heavy fired on aid workers. It also followed removal of a wider conflict which flared as militants in Lebanon fired rockets into northern Israel.

14-0 vote; US abstains

The vote was 14-0, with the United States abstaining. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said the UN "fully supports" the resolution but abstained "to see the outcomes of the Egyptian mediation" with Israel and Hamas, also aimed at achieving a ceasefire.

Israel and Hamas were not parties to the vote, but the text of the resolution was hammered out by the United States, Israel's chief ally, and by Arab countries that have ties to Hamas and the Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied territories.

Osama Hamdan, a Hamas envoy in Lebanon, told the al-Jazeera satellite channel that the group "is not interested in it because it does not meet the demands of the movement."

War not over

Hamas spokesperson Sami Abu Zuhri said the US failed to consider the interests of the Palestinian people. "The resolution doesn't mean that the war is over," he told the al-Jazeera satellite television network. "We advise the Palestinian fighters to mobilize and be ready to face the offensive, and we urge the Arab masses to carry on with their angry protests."

With Israeli troops now in control of many of the open areas used by militants to launch rockets, gunmen have continued shooting from inside populated neighborhoods.

The conflict has left huge deeds of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza increasingly desperate for food, water, fuel and medical assistance, and the situation was expected to worsen as humanitarian efforts falter amid storms in the fighting.

Ukrainian killed

One of the dead Thursday was a Ukrainian woman, and first foreigner to die in the fighting, according to Gaza Health Ministry official Dr. Moaiya Hassanein. He said the woman was married to a Palestinian doctor who trained in Ukraine and returned with her to Gaza. Her 2-year-old son was also killed in the rack shelling east of Gaza City, he said.

The Amnesty Council resolution "stresses the urgency of and calls for an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire, leading to the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza," expressed "grave concern" at the escalating violence and the deepening humanitarian crisis in Gaza and emphasized the need to open all border crossings and advance a lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Durable ceasefire

It also calls on UN member states "to intensify efforts to provide arrangements and guarantees in Gaza in order to sustain a durable ceasefire and calm, including to prevent illicit trafficking in arms and ammunition and to ensure the sustained reopening" of border crossings.

In addition, the resolution "condemns all violence and hostilities directed against civilians" and calls for "unimpeded humanitarian access to Gaza."

Israel has paused its operations for three four-hour periods in the last two days to allow aid to reach civilians.

Following the resolution, Egypt was expected to take the lead in persuading Israel and Hamas to accept it. Israeli representatives returned home from talks in Cairo Thursday and Hamas was due to send political leaders to the Egyptian capital on Saturday.

Guarantees

Israel's government says any ceasefire must guarantee an end to rocket fire and arms smuggling into Gaza. During a six-month ceasefire that ended with the renewed operation, Hamas is thought to have used tunnels under the Egypt-Gaza border to smuggle in the medium-range rockets it is now using to hit deeper than ever inside Israel.

Hamas has said it won't accept any agreement that does not include the full opening of Gaza's blockaded border crossings. Israel is unlikely to agree to that demand, as it believes Hamas would use it to strengthen its hold on the territory where it violently seized control in June 2007.

Right to self-defense

Hours after the UN Security Council passed a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire in Israel's offensive in Gaza, foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said on Friday Israel would act only as its own interests.

"Israel has acted, is acting and will act only according to its responsibility to protect the citizens of its citizens and its right to self-defense," a statement said. It made no direct reference to how Israel would treat the call for a ceasefire.

Livni, along with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Defense Minister Ehud Barak, conveyed in session on Friday to discuss the Security Council resolution calling for an immediate cessation of violence and their own moves in the conflict. —AP, Reuters

Pinoys back home from hell of Gaza

From page A1

Undaunted a more than 20-hour grueling journey by land and air, they arrived in Manila from Bangkok last night. Escorted by the International Red Cross, they had escaped through Jordan, from where they took a plane for Thailand for a stopover.

All in all, three families arrived. Of the 16 who children, their ages ranged from 1 to 11.

A 37th Filipino who also left is now "in the care of the Latin patriarch in Jerusalem," Department of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Claro Cristobal said.

"It was a very hectic and scary. We were living near the school. There were a lot of bomb explosions everywhere," Nenita Gerardo Hammoudeh, a native of Pampanga, told the Inquirer.

Extent of destruction

Nenita, married to a Palestinian, Red Cross aid with her four children.

"You don't know what the bombs are targeting. They just keep on targeting. They're lucky if your house is not the one bombed," she said.

She said that they could see on TV that many people had died in the bombing near the schools.

Another Filipina married to a Palestinian, Anabel Mangaliman Abu Hmaira, said they were relieved and happy that they could leave Gaza for Egypt.

"Anywhere. Everyday. There were a lot of bombings," said Anabel of Hanan, Bulacan, who escaped with her four children.

She said they could see the extent of the destruction along the roads as they fled.

Leila Sahanna Co, Salama of Dasi, Camarines Norte, said they were scared. "It's for the safety of the children," said Salama, also married to a Palestinian.

Vhel Sappiman is not complete," said Rosalie, 21. "It's good that we're here ... more safe [here] but my father and my sister are still there."

He said the usually populated streets of Gaza were empty by 6 in the evening.

Circuits with them

Abu Hmaira left her husband in Gaza "because we promised the safety of our children."

"My husband said he might have a hard time finding work here that's why he decided to stay behind," she said, carrying her youngest daughter Ilhne. "I'm happy that my children and I are here safe."

The 16 evacuees were accompanied by special envoys to the Middle East Roy Cimatu.

The feeling of relief pervaded children from the children as they smiled at the cameras, giggling at each other as they talked in Arabic, after they landed at the airport. Relatives of the different families said the children could not speak Filipino but understood English.

The evacuees left Cairo on a chartered flight of the International Red Cross at 11 a.m. Thursday together with other foreign nationals.

Pushed by RP Embassy staff

The Filipinos were fetched at the Israeli-Egyptian border by staff of the Philippine Embassy in Israel and taken by bus to Amman, Jordan where they took a flight to Manila via Bangkok.

There were a total of 136 Filipinos in Gaza before fresh hostilities between Israel and Hamas.

Cimatu said that Filipino humanitarians were helping supply food to the Filipinos in Gaza through the Philippine Embassy.

Cimatu said about 92 Filipinos were still in Gaza. Many are residing in areas which have not been guaranteed to be safe and their safety is would be no dangerous to travel. Others live near the borders and did not want to leave their families behind, he said.

Cimatu said the government was preparing for another evacuation operation for the remaining Filipinos in Gaza, but that there might be positive developments in the next few days.

Repatriation to continue

Foreign Undersecretary Rafaelita Consejo Jr. said repatriation of Filipinos in Gaza would continue "given another opening."

He said that of the Filipinos still in Gaza, 85 wanted to go back to the Philippines.

"The others decided to stay with their husbands there," he said. Consejo said he would join the others because of the increase fighting." With a report from Christine O. Avendaño

Palace to ask Congress for ₱2-B budget for poll automation

By TJ Burgonio

MALACAÑANG will ask Congress to pass a supplemental budget close to ₱2 billion for the automation of next year's national elections, allaying fears it preferred Charter change to the vote.

"That's among the possible strategies," Secretary Cerge Remonde told reporters yesterday when asked if the Executive Branch would ask for a supplemental budget.

He said that the Department of Budget and Management was expected to appropriate a budget for the automated elections (DBM).

"Electoral reforms is one of the key programs of President Macapagal-Arroyo, although she would include appropriating a budget for that. While it has not been discussed, I'm sure that will be dealt with appropriately," he said.

Budget Secretary Rolando Andaya said his department has asked the House of Representatives to pass an ₱11.8-billion supplemental budget for computerized elections.

"The supplemental bill has been drafted," he said in a text message, adding that the request has been forwarded to the House committee on appropriations.

The measure will be ratified as urgent by President Macapagal-Arroyo, Secretary Eduardo Ermita said. Congress is in recess and won't be resuming session until the third week of the month.

"There will be elections in 2010," Socio-Economic Planning Secretary Ralph Recto said in a phone interview. "Whatever they say that she's retooling her term, she has never mentioned it to me."

Chair Jose Melo of the Commission on Elections had disclosed that it was working on an ₱8-billion supplemental appropriation, and has relayed to Malacañang the need for such a budget.

The deadline for the supplemental budget should be March this year.

The elections body had been allotted some ₱12.8 billion to the 2009 national budget to prepare for next year's elections.

Sen. Richard Gordon has challenged President Macapagal-Arroyo to ask Congress to fund the computerization to disprove rumors that she was pursuing Charter change in praising her stay in power beyond June 30, 2010.

Republic of the Philippines
Quezon City
Office of the City Treasurer

NOTICE TO QUEZON CITY TAXPAYERS

This January 2009, the public is advised to settle their Quezon City local government taxes at the earliest possible time to avoid the inconveniences associated with the heavy volume of taxpayers expected to try to beat the deadline near the end of the month.

Updated Real Property Taxpayers who will pay their annual real property tax liability in full, on or before 31 March 2009, shall be entitled to a twenty percent (20%) discount on their tax due. Those who opt to pay on a quarterly basis may also avail of a ten percent (10%) discount, provided, that they make their quarterly payments on or before 31 March, 30 June, 30 September and 31 December 2009.

Please be reminded that failure to settle these tax liabilities on the above-stated dates, shall result in the imposition of a two percent (2%) interest on the tax due per month.

The public may pay directly to the City Treasurer's Office at the City Hall, or course payment through any of our accredited banks:

1. Philippine Veterans Bank
2. Development Bank of the Philippines
3. Land Bank of the Philippines
4. Philippine National Bank
5. Union Bank of the Philippines
6. Philippine Postal Savings Bank

Your taxes contribute to the realization of a truly Quality City.

VICTOR B. ENDRIGA, Ph. D.
City Treasurer

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Limited assurance

IT WAS "NO UNDUE" FOR SEN. RICHARD GORDON to suggest that President Macapagal-Arroyo is scheming to extend her term, and her lawyer Romulo Macalintal. If there is no budget for the 2010 elections, Macalintal said, then there is all the more reason to think there is no budget for Charter change. After all, elections are "scheduled by law," while Cha-cha is "just being studied."

EDITORIAL

Macalintal was reacting to the suspicion aired by Gordon that Malacañang has not submitted to Congress a supplemental budget for the nationwide computerized voting and counting so that elections cannot be held in 2010, thereby giving the Palace-backers an excuse to extend her term. "They are still thinking of the Con-con and the Con-ass," Gordon said in reference to the two modes of amending the Constitution: through a constitutional convention or a constituent assembly.

It is a bit of a stretch to connect a failure to automate to a failure to conduct elections and therefore seem conclusive for incumbent officials. With or without the computerization of the voting and/or counting, elections can still be held, albeit under our old, slow and much abused and corrupted manual system. But the fact that Gordon, an administration ally, would see sinister motives behind Malacañang's failure to submit a supplemental budget only shows how low Malacañang's credibility has sunk.

Malacañang's lack of credibility and the widespread suspicion about its motives are especially evident when it comes to Charter change and term extension. For even as Palace spokesmen proclaim the purest of intentions in seeking Charter change, the President's allies in the House of Representatives, including her ace Rep. Mikey Arroyo, keep gunning for the kind of Charter change that opens avenues for Ms Arroyo to remain in power, like changing the form of government to a parliamentary system whether her term expires. Some congressmen wouldn't even bother to hide their intentions behind some noble purpose and simply—chauvinistically—want to extend the terms of everyone holding elective office, not sweeping themselves, of course.

But they cannot do it, Macalintal said, "otherwise, we will have absurd situations wherein, in the future, all elective officials will just amend the Charter to extend their term." He cited a Supreme Court decision which said that being a democracy, we can only be governed by leaders who have the people's mandate. That, he concluded, elective officials "cannot lengthen their government existence without the mandate of the governed. My opinion is that a new Charter cannot change or extend their terms, for their contract with the voters was only till 2010."

This prohibition, however, applies only to outright term extension. It will not cover a shift to parliamentary system, which will clear the way for Ms Arroyo to seek the post of prime minister. She can then argue that she is running for a different position under a different Charter, and once she wins a seat in parliament, she can claim that the people had given her a fresh mandate. A change to the form of government will make it an entirely new ball game, and nothing, not even the Supreme Court, can keep Ms Arroyo from seeking the highest post again. And while she may no longer be the president, she can exercise all the powers of the presidency and enjoy all its privileges, depending on how the new Constitution defines the powers of the head of government.

We do not know if Macalintal is privy to the President's political plans or if he has been authorized to speak in her behalf (he certainly has not made such claims), but even if he were, it would be unwise to accept his assurance that she really will step down at the end of her term. This assurance rests on the premise that the present Constitution will remain untouched until June 30, 2010. But there is no guarantee that it will remain the way it is now. Despite strong public opposition, despite clear signals from the Senate that it will not cooperate, the President's allies continue to push for their self-serving agenda.

No one should accept any assurance that staying in power is not on the President's agenda. Not even if it comes from the President's lawyer. Not even (as not cigar-stuffy!) if it comes from the President herself. Until time runs out on the Cha-cha train, it is our time to let our guard down.

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Israel's war: an eye for a tooth

PUBLIC LIVES

Randy David

THOSE 700 PALESTINIANS I HAVE LIKE SPACE

Israel began its assault on the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip two weeks ago. At this, more than 700 Palestinians, Israel has reported 30 casualties on its side for the same period, three of them civilians. The crude benchmark Spinoza endorsed that the scrappy Palestinian forces have fired into Israeli soil are mere slingshots beside the mechanized infantry artillery units, warplanes and armed helicopter gunships that the highly trained and disciplined Israeli Defense Forces have deployed to destroy targets in Gaza.

By any measure, this is not a war but a slaughter, and a retaliatory response has an outrageously excessive. The Israeli nation's transformation from a victims' victim to callous aggressor is complete.

Gaza's 1.5 million residents are trapped in what is possibly the most densely inhabited strip of land in the world. All border crossings have been sealed by Israeli forces. Intermittent rocket fire from Hamas militants, launched in an effort to draw Israeli troops into the quickly form the Israeli attack or slowly from starvation in Gaza City, the thousands that have sought refuge in schoolhouses run by the United Nations cannot stop out of these buildings without risk of being fired upon. A major humanitarian crisis looms in Gaza and medical supplies are out. The other day, in response to 139 prisoners, Israel intercepted to assault for exactly three hours to allow trucks to bring in supplies. That is promptly resumed firing, forcing Gaza's residents to scurry back to their shelters.

The Israeli military has vowed to pursue this war to its bitter end. The Hamas to stars have threatened to make Gaza a graveyard for Israeli soldiers. International knows that the assault succeeds in destroying Gaza, the most ferocious Hamas will appear in Palestinian and Arab eyes. The more indeed the oppression it mounts, the more it justifies the belief that the establishment of the Palestinian Authority under the leadership of the moderate Fatah was a blunder. The longer the Israeli assault lasts, the more ascendant Islamist extremism becomes.

Israel has underlined this a year it can never hope to win by sheer military might. It can reduce the whole Gaza Strip into a rust no man's land, but at what price? The more Palestinian civilians it kills, the more it induces itself it new foes vicious to flee to neighboring Arab countries. But it is unlikely that Egypt to its southwest, or Jordan to the east, or Lebanon and Syria to the northeast will make room for hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees from Gaza. They will be no room for them to flee at the Fatah-controlled West Bank. The Palestinian was dislodged from Gaza in 2007 by the popular Hamas in an armed conflict.

It begin to appreciate the complexity of this conflict, it may be necessary to sketch the broad strokes in which it is embedded. Israel is holding national elections in February this year. Ariey aims in this election is precisely how to deal with Palestinian provocation emanating from Gaza. The incumbent government has been criticized for not being decisive in its response to the Hamas. Many suspect that the present assault is in response to blaming those criticisms.

The picture is perhaps even more complicated on the Palestinian side. The creation of a Palestinian homeland to be governed by an autonomous Palestinian Authority within Israeli occupied territory was hailed more than a decade ago as a breakthrough for peace in the Middle East. Yasser Arafat's Fatah party became the Palestinian administrative overnight under an arrangement brokered by Western powers and supported by most world. Its major premise was the recognition of Israel's right to exist in this contested patch of the world. Arafat, who died in 2004, believed that the only way to overcome class and armed guerrilla factions that had historically opposed the creation of Israel, was hailed as a hero by the major powers. But sections of the Arab world denounced him as a sell-out. The Fatah itself became known as a corrupt lackey of Israel and the United States.

The Hamas, firmly Islamic in orientation compared to the secular Fatah, never recognized the right of Israel to exist. Like the Hezbollah in Lebanon, it also drew popular support to its cause by embarking on socially-oriented projects aimed at alleviating the conditions of the people. In 2006, it defeated the Fatah in Gaza elections, an event that deeply disturbed Israel and the United States. The latter moved to arm and train the Fatah but as in a futile attempt to keep the Hamas in check. This intervention only enhanced the standing of the Hamas as Palestinian patriots.

The core of events suggests that whenever a Palestinian group drops its militancy and hostility to negotiate, it risks losing its legitimacy to the process. The Hamas knew this and consciously used its tactics. In June 2008, it agreed to enter into a six-month truce with Israel on the initiative of Egypt. During this period, rockets fired from Gaza were down to about 98 percent of the number fired in the preceding period. The few rockets that were fired by an Islamic Jihad group were immediately disowned by Hamas. It was a good sign that went unappreciated.

The truce broke down even before it could run its full course. Israel did not lift the economic blockade of Gaza. The smuggling of goods and arms by Hamas through tunnels running from Egypt continued. As attacks and retaliations grew menacingly at each other on Christmas Day, the war of its stated indifferently, forgetting that, in the last analysis, we are all Semites.

Comments to public.lives@gmail.com

Rotten to the core

GET REAL

Solita Collas-Monsod

SECRETARY AGAINST BROTHER, SISTER IN

Lots against sister-in-law, cousin against cousin, poor but honest Marites refusing to accept a bribe that would get him out of poverty, some Marites standing up to a high government official who is trying to bamboozle her, lawyers going their merry ways undeterred in the face of threats, being disbarred, suit-less members "resigning" first from their jobs, just from the task force's because they are "under a cloud." The way can a telenovela beat these stories for sheer drama and human interest.

Not that viewing, reading and listening public might get accustomed to all these individuals at all corners from the so-called Alabang Boys corruption system that is in a state of rot, if not rotten to the core. And unless concrete measures are taken to stop or excise that rot, the rule of law in the Philippines, already in extremis, will cease to exist.

An exaggeration? Hardly. A criminal justice system has five elements, called "pillars" by Investment, Prosecution, Judiciary, Corrections, and Community Each of the first four, whether by association with government, has been rocked with scandals...and we don't have to have long memories, because they are of recent vintage.

Take the Corrections pillar—the prison system, especially December 29, when Pampanga Rep. Mikey Arroyo, himself previously free about Big Bilibid in the national penitentiary, being served hand and foot not just by other prisoners on their payroll, but by the prison authorities themselves, who may also be on their payroll. (I remember the outbreaks "escapes" reported in the press whenever the escapees generally are high-profile inmates, those with money and/or political power and influence. Some don't escape—they are released prematurely, by want of a better word—and again, these happen to be high-profile cases.

Second, take the Courts pillar, it rarely has been less than six months since the Court of Appeals (CA) scandal broke out, resulting in the dismissal of one justice, the suspension of another, and reprimands of three others. This, hardly a year after another scandal involving the Thirty Days of CA justice (no one punished!) who were selling temporary restraining orders, among other things. At the same time, the Supreme Court has not been spared from scandal, with Supreme Court Justice Dante Tinga actually being accused of receiving a P10-million bribe (the charge was dismissed by the high court) and the Corona case fined P10,000). The names of Justices Consuelo Ynares-Santiago and Minita Chico-Nazario were also bandied about (both cleared by their Supreme Court colleagues).

Third, take the Prosecution pillar. Less than six months ago, what has been labeled as the biggest drug bust (valued at P900 billion worth of equipment and products) in the country took place in La Union. The cases against five of the six suspects were dismissed for lack of evidence, by prosecutors from the Department of Justice, even as four members of the police were recommended to be charged. (Does this mean that the policemen were the drug manufacturers?) The actions or omissions of the prosecutors were met with disbelief in the La Union community as much as from Iglesia ni Cristo Bishop Antonio Bilbao repeatedly asked President Macapagal-Arroyo that the case be transferred from the DOJ office in Manila to prosecutors in La Union. (She apparently had more faith in them.)

While the spotlight is now on the DOJ, one cannot help pointing to the Office of the Ombudsman, where, according to one source, "case is just lie there and just die there." One particular case stands out: when the Supreme Court had ruled that the Comelec had awarded a contract in clear violation of law and jurisprudence, but the Ombudsman found that no one in the Comelec was to blame.

Last but definitely not the least, the Executive pillar, where the scandals and controversies involving its members are almost too numerous to mention—the most recent ones being the "vote generals" and the shooting deaths of Alfonso de Vera and his 7-year-old daughter Liz Alfonso. But one cannot forget police involvement in the Hacienda Binalbagan case, where Aboy P100 million also disappeared, or in the murder of Bubby Dacer and his driver.

The Alabang Boys affair, however, has dragged down the criminal justice system to new depths. Because here we have one of its pillars at each other's throats, one threatening to sic the other's prosecutors, one threatening to sic the other's prosecutors of bribe-taking, and the other answering the charge of incompetence, in the very least. All in public. Since the two government agencies usually work very closely with each other, one can only presume that they know whatever they speak with respect to each other's shortcomings.

Ironically, the Arroyo administration, from its inception, emphasized the need for reforming criminal justice system if the country is to have sustained development. Its current development plan devotes two chapters to this topic. It is puzzling, however, that the plan does not contemplate only with the enforcement pillar, where it is obvious that the one common thread running through all the scandals listed above is corruption.

How widespread is this corruption? An SWS survey conducted in 2003 (2004 table 4) all 59 percent of lawyers surveyed said that many or very many of the police are corrupt; 48 percent of them 101 percent in Metro Manila) were aware of a case in their locality where a judge took a bribe, although only 6 percent (15 people in Metro Manila) reported a bribing the judges surveyed, 62 percent estimated that either a few or some of their colleagues were corrupt.

Time is running out.

'What's the latest?'

Social Climate

Mahar Mangahas

THE MOST COMMON QUESTION OF FRIENDS and acquaintances, right after they greet me Happy New Year, is "What's the latest?" referring, most of all, to prospects for the next national election in 2010, according to the SWS surveys.

I tell them that the survey leaders are a cluster of three, namely Noli de Castro, Manny Villar, and Loren Legarda, and that I refer them to the SWS website, since I can't remember so many numbers, all the more as another year passes by.

Anyway, for the nth time, last Nov. 7, SWS reported the finding of its September 2008 survey that the most numerous choice of voters personally who would be good (regarding) successors of President Macapagal-Arroyo, with up to three names accepted, were—with percentages in parentheses—De Castro (28), Villar (16), Legarda (16), Panfilo Lacson (13), Fernando Gonzalez (11), Joseph Estrada (11), and Mar Roxas (11).

All others, including GMA, Bayani Fernando, Antonio Trillanes et al., got one percent or less. In short, the aspirants cluster into three groups: the top three, then a group of four at least 9 points away, and then everyone else.

Of course, the voters' opinions, as to their names now presented to prompt the respondents, is a result, we discover that some Filipinos favor the return of ERAP or Estrada, and some favor Trillanes, though he would not yet be 40 years old by then. If the Constitution is not changed, they are legally disqualified, or they would welcome constitutional changes that would qualify GMA, Erap or Trillanes.

SWS is neither for or against Charter change. For as long as there is no change, we assume the identity in the letter of the Constitution and in the governance. From time to time, depending on the intensity of public debate, we have included the issue of Charter change in our research on public opinion, focusing on the substance of proposed changes...which ultimately tend to win approval in a referendum—instead of on the mode of change which depends on Congress as a whole, and not on popular concerns.

SWS has used the open-ended question in good measure to climb in all its quarterly surveys since September 2007, and will continue to do so in the coming quarters. Next Tuesday, together with its regular survey results done in partnership with the Asian Institute of Management, SWS will announce the new results as of December 2008.

The process of open opinion polling is intended to enhance public participation in democratic discourse. Both of us, individually known only outside ourselves, and the opinions of those closer to us, do not know the opinions of those we for every for us to listen to directly. It takes scientific surveying, openly requested, to enable us to understand, collectively, the collective will. Otherwise we are readily easily guessing, though, to be sure, we cannot (and I don't count myself as sure) are better guessers than others.

In using survey reports, there are two basic premises that one accepts, consciously or unconsciously. The first premise is that the collective will of the people matters. In a democratic society, essential to a democratic society. The principle is, one person, one vote. Regardless of personal background, including education, each person's opinion has equal importance. Opinion polling illustrates only in democratic societies. There is no opinion polling in dictatorships, where only the whims of the dictator matter.

The second premise is that the people are royal will the truth. In a matter of fact, Filipinos...like other nationalities—generally do. Because should remember that this depends on the right of freedom of speech. People should feel free to speak, not just to those they know closely, but even to a stranger, like an interviewer, who drops by to ask questions. An interviewer, to one in the opposite society, should be free to ask questions. (In China, traditionally, social surveys questionnaires, including those done for market research, must pass government inspection.)

A respondent should be free to give any information or answer, as well as to refuse to answer. Otherwise, the findings would be biased, if interviewees, punishment, for giving particular answers will not produce truthful responses. The anonymity of respondents should be guaranteed. Every response should be faithfully recorded. The responses should be statistically summarized, and only the survey instructions should be free to report their findings. Some of these elements of free speech should be taken for granted. We have had to fight for them, all of us many times over.

* * *

The 2009 SWS survey theme will be held on Jan. 15, from 2 to 5 p.m., at PCBoom 2-4, AIM Conference Center Manila, Makati City.

Among its topics will be measures of economic and social well being, including hunger, poverty, and victimizations by crime, and public opinion on governance and corruption, as the basis for public on the 27th SWS dyad, proposals to extend the term limits of government officials, and proposals to involve the government deeply in education in family planning and in promotion of responsible parenthood. The SWS mailbox is swsmail@pldtdsl.net, the SWS phone is 920-0402 (fax) or send swspolls@yahoo.com, or register online at http://www.pollcat.net/SWS2008.asp, the Manuel Antonio Roxas Building, 2nd floor, Quezon Avenue corner Sct. Tuazon, Quezon City. Contact SWS at 924-7470 to 73

Filipinos are best hope for RP

THE YEAR 2009 HOLDS JUST SHORT of and not just 365 and the Philippines is set for a tough time but the whole world as well. With the global economic meltdown, many people aside from the farther fall of the US dollar and the collapse of the international bond market by this year. It looks broader still because the recession crisis, which has kept on worsening for more than a year, will last several more years. The aggregate economic losing per forward for industrialized nations are simply astounding.

On the home front, the global crisis has worsened the Philippine crisis situation, creating widespread unease. The decline in export income, foreign loans and OFW remittances will mean fewer resources for Philippine production and consumption.

The chance for jobs, decent wages, industrial development, land reform, adequate social services and respect for the democratic rights of the working people will stay limited. This will also push the Filipino people to march and rally on the streets and air their demands. And this will intensify the vicious regime-communist-rebellion axis in picking itself in power.

The Arroyo regime will do anything for (better) change that will undermine our economic sovereignty and national patrimony, and to get US support, allow foreign investors 100-percent ownership of land and all kinds of enterprises.

But if Cha-cha fails, the regime is preparing to rig the 2010 election in order to protect its loot and secure impunity for its criminal liabilities. At the same time, it is preparing to employ massive electoral fraud and terrorism to secure (the election of its own candidates as it did in 2004 and 2007.

In spite of all these problems, hope springs eternal in our hearts because we are a people and the ones who are going to act it right. We will continue to be vigilant against any attempts of this regime to stay in power and vote to stop it to prevent it. It is also through our actions that our economy will prosper with the implementation of genuine industrialization and genuine agrarian reform.

However may we put it, it, Philippines are the hope of Filipinos and the Philippines. It is our initiatives that will make this come to pass.

—TITUS LOPEZ,
public information officer,
Bagong Alyansang Makabayan-Bikol (Bayan-Bikol),
Barangay 17 (Legaspi City, Albay)

Thanks, applause for Ms Elizalde

I (COMMUNITY BALLET MANILA led by world-class talent Lisa Macuja-Elizalde for her relentless effort in giving joy to others through her artistic performances. I equally commend her sponsors, one of which is the Ayalas, for supporting her "Ten-bang Kwentos ni Lola Basyang" by Severino Reyes.

Last Dec. 27, my three girls and I went to Star City for the children's annual rides. It was literally too that it was the last day of "Lola Basyang" at Aliw Theater. Imagine for P75 each an entrance fee, we had the best time. Thanks again to Ms. Elizalde and her generous sponsors. Indeed, we got more than our money's worth.

Aside from "Lola Basyang," we had on that same night "Da Magking Kanding" (held at Star Theater), a free 30-minute show also led by Ms Elizalde. Any children and I couldn't help but wonder where her energy comes from.

The critics become the children's secondary fans. With the two shows, I couldn't help but share in the happiness my children felt just by watching Ms Macuja and the other cast of ballet Manila.

How I wish other world-class artists in the country would share their crafts in the least expensive like Ms Elizalde does. How I wish more philanthropic sponsors would support world-class shows so most people especially children would be inspired to be the best that they can be.

The conduct of shows as part of business is after all, not just about boosting earnings and accumulating of profit margins. In these hard times, we badly need people like Ms Elizalde, whose passion is changing her talents goes beyond money matters. May God bless her more! May her tribe increase!

—HELEN DOCENA-ARIELA,
teacher, Don Alejandro Roces Sr. Science Technology H.S.
Roces Avenue, Quezon City

Greatest gift: ability to give hope

AS I PASS FREEDOM THEATRICLE titled, "Ables boy gets gift of limbs" (Inquirer, 12/28/08), I couldn't help but cry, though it was only on Dec. 31 when I got hold of a copy of this heartwarming news.

When my counterpart Ed Escudero called to tell me that we made it to the front page of the business, I was so delighted. However, it so happened that I was just about to leave the house early in the morning for a trip to a remote area, so I wouldn't get a copy of the paper. (Newspapers reach Kalibo not until about 9:30-10 a.m.)

After ORR (OFC and the other local radio stations read the Inquirer, we were all over the radio the next morning and the station managers interviewed the doctors and Gladey for everyone to know. They called me for an interview too.

Though it has been a challenging year for us here in Aklan, the greatest gift ever I got this Christmas and New Year is giving hope to Antal Shapers and knowing that, finally he can now walk and make his dreams real. God truly works in mysterious ways. Thanks to our doctors from the Metro Pedi Makati headed by Jet Jimenez, Dr. Percy Bondoc (the last time I met him was in Seoul), the Philippine General Hospital, Tzu Chi Foundation and all others who have been there for Arnel and Ramey Imam.

I just want to say "Thank you" guys, to the doctors, the general hospital, my radio drama real too for us in Boracay, in behalf of the Aklanons and our sister and women in Boracay Club of Kalibo, we wish you all a great year ahead!

We can't wait to see Arnel here in Aklan soon.

—ROLAND "MEGS" LAURIA,
president, '87-2008-09,
Rotary Club of Kalibo,
Ecos (R) D 3810

Sales promos temporary by nature

HOUSE SPEAKER PROSPERO Nograles' threat of a congressional inquiry into the telecommunications firms' "manipulation" of call-and-text promo packages at the peak of the holiday season betrays an appalling ignorance of how the economy and purpose of sales promotions.

Any biz school sophomore knows that a consumer sales promo offers a short-term incentive—price discounts, samples, bonus packs, etc.—to induce purchases, i.e., "buy/have/use" the sine qua non is to get consumers to try a new product, or switch brands, or buy up inventory to make way for new stock; or to influence purchase-quantity/acceleration timing.

Purchase timing is vital for service businesses with limited equipment and facility capacity, and with variable demand, like passenger airlines, buses, hotels and restaurants. During peak periods these businesses turn away customers in the least source their seats are empty.

The telcos had specified, and the National Telecommunications Commission has confirmed, that the call-and-text promos embodied in their SMS plans are within the law. Given the coverage period, because these are precisely the peak periods when high traffic volume causes network congestion and frustrates full and efficient servicing.

One direct way of managing (demand) is to shift it to lighter hours and days. That's why discounts between midnight and 5 a.m. and on weekends and less after happy hours. But as the Speaker should know, metrobiz don't give discounts on Valentine's Day.

—JESSE I. ORC,
Marketing Management Department,
College of Business and Economics,
De La Salle University

Stop Israeli attacks in Gaza Strip

ISRAELI ATTACKS ON POPULATED Gaza should shock the conscience of the world. They must stop.

It is time for the United States and the United Nations to enforce international laws and resolutions related to the conflict, and allow a more peaceful coexistence.

—ROBERT E. GATES,
psychologist,
1109 Lieto St., Bed; Bed Pa. 19754

'Pinoy Medicare'

I CANNOT AGREE MORE WITH PETE Carlos Aguilar's Jan. 7 letter, titled "Spreading the spirit of abundance." Only a positive attitude will lift all of us out of the coming financial drama. As we give to the world, so we get in return.

To find spirit, may I make some mention for this new year: Believing that success to be more blessed than it currently acknowledged, perhaps our legislators may look into the possibility of a "Universal Pinoy Medicare" to remove the fear of prolonged medication so (should) they have to visit a hospital) of Filipino and families among Filipinos. Many are victims of accidents or crimes through no fault of theirs, but the community still pays, one way or another. We are bound to each other as a nation, so we have a duty to look after each other's common welfare: simple justice dictates no less.

Universal Pinoy Medicare is not an illusion it can and must be achieved for the common good. We can rise to the occasion.

Through bayanihan: let us stop keep debating it, but welcome it instead, to make this not a year of blankness and grimness but of joy and peace.

"What goes around comes around."

—MAZZIE ESCOBAR-DIAZ,
Cagayan de Oro City 9000

Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP)
Magallanes cor. Real Streets, Intramuros, Manila

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND BID

The Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), the largest corporate led non-profit social development foundation in the Philippines, through its Bids and Awards Committee (BAC) invites interested Contractors to apply for eligibility and bid for the construction of PBSP-TBLINC Officer and Conference Room located at Mr. Halimbud Building, T.M. Kalaw Ave., Ermita, Manila. Total Approved Budget for Construction is Php 2.1M.

A Contractor-bidder should:

- Should have experience in similar undertaking with in the last 2 years.
- Will key personnel and equipment for the execution of the contract.

Interested bidders are requested to submit the following pre-qualification requirements on or before 5:00 pm, January 16, 2009:

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List of related / completed projects

Addressed to :

Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP)
BAC Secretariat / General Services Unit
Magallanes cor. Real Streets
Intramuros, Manila
Telephone Number: 527-7741

Pre-qualified bidders shall be invited in a pre-bid conference scheduled on January 20, 2009.

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Wrong about German history and Israel

LETTER-WRITER C. M. PHILLIPS (Inquirer, 1/7/09) obviously has been reading the wrong history books and appreciates Israel in the same way Mahmoud Ahmadinejad does.

Phillips says Nazi Germany of the mid-1930s was also a democracy. Wrong. Germany was democratic until a dictatorship took over; instead Germany into a Nazi state, practiced genocide and made a total mess of the entire European.

3rd Phillips perhaps regret that Israel should do nothing after being provocatively bombarded for months with deadly rockets by the Hamas who share the same objective as Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Adolf Hitler did: which is to wipe the Jews off the face of the earth!

The Jewish pogrom "Never again" rings true today more than ever.

—CESAR M. BELLO-REYES,
cesalleyr@globelines.com.ph

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In the grip of WB-IMF, gov't always helpless

EDMUNDO ANDRICO'S LETTER, "SP STIMULUS due to drop in government" (Inquirer, 1/5/09), is OK with me if "good governance" is defined as the pursuit of policies that result in the national interest rather than the pursuit of policies that conform to the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) of Transparency International (TI). Why the distinction?

Actually the CPI of TI is a performance rating system for the guidance and benefit of transnational corporations. Under this rating system, compliance with the World Bank International Monetary Fund (WB-IMF) prescriptions—liberalization, deregulation, privatization and level playing field—is the controlling yardstick. Hence, the examples cited by Andrico—the peso—as a trading post, not a country—the highest rating (9.4 to 9.5). Moreover, as a trading zone, the WB-IMF prescription works to the peso's best interest. The Philippines is the "kiddest" (2.6 to 2.5) not because corruption here is our country is unmatched in our part of the world but because the protectionist policies embedded in our Constitution are anathema to the WB-IMF prescription. Our country's CPI will improve should the Arroyo regime succeed in changing the provisions in its efforts to do nationalize the economy through Charter change.

The WB-IMF prescription—which in short, means "for governance is the problem, not the solution"—is at the root of what, in the language of Paul Krugman, "looks an awful lot like the beginning of a second Great Depression."

"Manufacturing, in particular, is plunging everywhere. Banks aren't lending. Business and consumers aren't spending," Krugman adds. In the face of a depression-prone global economy, however, the teams of the sovereign number, such as MD's and Cabinet officials, are running to government for a bailout. How the government is the solution.

Even if we hand over our government to union, our situation will not improve so long as we are in the grip of the WB-IMF prescription. That prescription is for the aggrandizement of transnational corporations, not for the liberation of the Filipino from unemployment, poverty and injustice.

—ARNOLFO LEE DICHOSO,
Unit 2202, Union Square Condominium,
145 Fifth Avenue, Cubao, Quezon City

INQUIRER Visayas

Editor Jun Bandayrel
Assoc. Chief Editor L. Benedicto

Mom discovers Internet for career as artist

By Carla P. Gomez
Bacolod City

A BACOLEÑA ARTIST HAS TURNED TO THE INTERNET TO SELL her art and has discovered that she could be a stay-at-home mom and still have a lucrative career.

Alpha Trinidad-Shanahan, 45, who recently held a one-woman show in Bacolod City, lives based in Israel with her husband Philip Shanahan with whom she has twins, Connor and Shell, 5.

Shanahan, who also has a twin named Sigma, is a former nun, teacher and a concert violinist.

"I am a self-taught artist who has discovered the joys of drawing and painting in my 30s. Now I am a stay-at-home mom and grateful for my passion for art, which helps me balance my energy especially through the days when domestic duties can be very demanding," she said.

SHANAHAN

"Creativity is a gift and my response is to give my best in every artwork as it becomes a prayer of thanksgiving to God the Almighty," Shanahan added.

The artist is the daughter of the late Joaquin and Josencia Trinidad of Bacolod City and is an MS Psychology graduate from the University of Saint La Salle here.

Former nun

As a nun for six years, Shanahan worked among the Negros in the Cordilleras, and later in Taiwan.

After she quit being a nun at 27, she went on teaching at the University of St. La Salle in Bacolod, Notre Dame in Cotabato and Assumption in Cebu.

When Shanahan married Philip, an English teacher from Ireland who works for the Center for British Teachers, she moved to Saudi Arabia with him and later to Malaysia and Brunei, where they have been living for a year now.

Her vast experience and travels have enriched her eye as an artist.

"I am mostly drawn to women as my subjects for my paintings. No doubt for me, though, A favorite master artist is Modigliani. I have a few small paintings done after his style. Catholic images also inspire me (such as) images of Jesus, Mary, the saints, the Pope, angels, etc. Once in a while, I do some florals or some other subjects for variety. Drawing something new is always a challenge I delight in," Shanahan said.

Her adventure in painting began eight years ago before she met her husband when she turned for something more than what a teaching job could offer.

"I grew up in a very creative environment and my artistic inclination did not leave much room to blossom in a very hectic teaching schedule. So, I packed up and started a small house and started drawing and painting. After about a year, I invited some friends to a little party to see my work. Their reminiscence were encouraging," she said.

Then romance caught up with her; Shanahan got married and had to leave for Saudi Arabia where her husband worked as a teacher.

"A month before departure, I found out I was pregnant with twins. So the following months were mostly adjusting to my new state of life, to a new country and to being pregnant. All my painting materials never got unpacked," she said.

First, the couple decided to move back to Bacolod City for her or give birth or she could be close to her sisters.

"We only stayed in Bacolod until the boys were 4 months old before moving to my husband's new job in Malaysia. My painting materials again traveled with us, but they remained kept in boxes until the boys turned three," Shanahan said, and she decided it was time to paint again.

"My home studio evolved from just a tabletop in my kitchen, living room to bedroom, wherever my boys were playing or sleeping, on a spare bedroom.

Balance

Painting can seem like a hobby then, just to give me some space I can call my own. It provided some balance to my very busy life as a stay-at-home Israeli-cum-mother to twin boys," she said.

This was also the time when she was introduced into the blog world, she said.

"I discovered many blogs by artists who paint every day and post their small works of art. So, in September 2007, I started my Daily Art Walk blog. I had so many small works scattered in folders or boxes, waiting to be posted," Shanahan said.

Blogging also helped her sell her work. "As an artist blogger, I got introduced to so many other opportunities and sites where artists can display or sell their work. That was when I started to think of selling my artwork," she said.

"COMPASSION"

Shanahan posted her artworks on the Etsy Online Shop and on the Australian-based Red Bubble Shop.

At first, she said her customers were her family and friends.

"Then slowly, strangers from other countries ordered her work.

"They either found my blog through surfing or they are artists or readers who also run shops with Etsy and RedBubble. I reached a point where I told myself I have to start thinking business here," she said.

Approaching the whole thing as a hobby was not enough anymore, she said.

"I needed organization and time management to my studio so I'm able to meet the demands in my shops. I needed professional tools, too, locally and tomorrow, ironically. My being a mom still comes first in everything. This belief got me even more driven to work with a timetable as my household does not collapse," she said.

Selling in addition to Etsy and RedBubble, Shanahan has other online shops where her paintings are available for purchase. Dawnindo Online Shop is similar to Etsy but based in Germany.

Another is the Absolute Arts site where she has her portfolio.

All the links to the online shops where Shanahan's art are being sold can be found on her blog at www.dailyartwalk.blogspot.com. One can also view her art at www.alphashanahan.etsy.com.

Shanahan also held a one-woman show in Bacolod last December where she sold many of her works.

Rated 'A' indie comes to Cebu

By Rhiza Loyola
Cebu City

CONCERTO" (DAVID PAU Diaz), a Filipino in last year's Cinemalaya festival, will finally be shown in Cebuanon audiences starting Jan. 14 at SM Cebu during the week-long filmfest.

The war drama, directed by Rod Alexander Mendez and with dialogues spoken in Tagalog and Cebuano tells a tale of Nipenggo, but been endorsed by the film body of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines for its technical qualities and treatment of faith and family.

Fr. Rolando M. Dela, executive director of the Communications Center of the University of San Carlos, hailed the movie for its "superb filmic qualities."

The syncopated rhythms, 'Concerto' shows how a family strives to carry on a normal life in abnormal times, with the pieces symbolized for harmony not only within the family itself but also within the country-wide setting that accommodates the Japanese. Instead of hostilities encounters, this war story reveals the quiet interplay of compassion and trust," she said.

"Among other themes, there is a care look at the Japanese missing home, and a delicate treatment of what might have been between young rebels."

One of the actors, who portrayed the character Dr. Tan, is a sibling of the filmmaker.

A POSTER for "Concerto"

'Concerto' shows how a family strives to carry on a normal life in abnormal times

ner Yap that from Barrosan Island in Cebu. Two of his brothers were drama at engineering and architecture of the USC during the late 1970s.

The movie also features Cebuano comic Eney Lim, who has been based in Manila for some time, and Danny Freitas from Samar, once a top Filipino ballet dancer.

Touted as a true story, the film has been cited "A" by the Cinema Evaluation Board, who said it was of the same mold as Peque Gallaga's "Oro, Plata, Mata ..." and Eddie Romero's "Tatsulo/Kami Muna, Hanggang Kaya Ninyong?"

A special screening has also been organized by the University of the Philippines Cebu Student Council for UP students for Jan. 17. The Southwestern University's student council set a special previewfor its faculty members and students yesterday.

Other screenings are being organized by University of the Visayas alumni headed by lawyer Joseph Ibañez and the group of Nicolas Anquilo, literature professor at the Cebu Institute of Technology.

E-mail: acrossthenation@inq.com.ph Website: www.inquirer.net/regions
Across the NATION
Assistant Editor: Rina Jimenez-David

Bishop to negotiate cops' release

LUCENA CITY—A CATHOLIC BISHOP ON FRIDAY offered to negotiate with communist rebels for the release of three policemen who were being held as "prisoners of war."

Bishop Emilio Marquez, head of the Diocese of Lucena, said the families of two of the policemen sought his help Friday and requested him to negotiate for the safe release of the captive lawmen reportedly under the custody of the NPA's Bicolano Antano Arnuld Command operating in Rizal province.

"The families came to me and asked for my help. It is my obligation to help them in whatever capacity that I can," Marquez told Inquirer.

Marquez said he is currently trying to establish contact with the communist guerrillas to start negotiations for the police-men's release.

"They (NPA) can contact me anytime ... or they can send emissaries," Marquez said.

Senior Supt. Aaron Rocorata Pelare, Calabarzon police deputy director for operations and concurrent head of Task Force Mamasapano, a police unit, fired bombing 500 rebels holding the three lawmen, said they welcomed the independent initiatives of anyone who want to help in securing the freedom of the captives.

"We appreciate all efforts to help the policemen's families. We don't have any problem with that," he said over the phone.

Supt. Rex Castigador, 9Ci Albert DC Umali and PO1 Arvin Agaton were captured by the NPA over the weekend after the unarmed guerrillas ambushed a police patrol car sent to investigate reports that rebels had burned a dump truck in Rodriguez, Rizal.

Aside from the three aspirin, one policeman died and two civilians were injured in the encounter.

In a statement, Ka Armas Guerrero, spokesman of the Bicolano Detachment, said from its Rizal province, said the three lawmen were all safe.

The NDF is the political arm of the communist revolutionary movement.

Guerrero said the three policemen were being treated well "according to the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law and the Protocol II of the Geneva Convention."

The rebel spokesman said the captive policemen would be investigated for possible crimes against the people and the revolutionary movement and if convicted, they would be tried under the guerrilla's "revolutionary justice."

However, said the communist guerrillas were willing to negotiate for the release of the captives but demanded a halt to rescue operations. Dalbo T. Abalos Jr., Inquirer Southern Luzon

OX SEASON
The Carabaos, where the most recognized animal is the carabao, may not be too familiar with the Year of the Ox. But these children from Sabangan town of Mountain Province could still look forward to a good season if the impact of the US recession hits the

Farmers turn to fasting vs aerial spraying

By Ma. Cecilia Rodriguez
Inquirer Mindanao

CAGAYAN DE ORO CITY—After spending the holidays at their picket line in front of the Court of Appeals building here, a farmers' group protesting aerial spraying in banana farms in Davao City has turned to fasting.

Seven members of the Mamamayan Apass sa Aerial Spraying (Mass) inhaled food the whole day on Thursday as part of a sit-down protest to press the CA to immediately decide on whether to lift the suspension of a Davao City ordinance banning aerial crop dusting there.

The Supreme Court has given the appellate court until Jan. 25 to issue a ruling. The Pilipino Banana Growers and Exporters Association (Pbgea), which has vigorously opposed the implementation of the ordinance, sought the help of the court in the middle of last year.

On Tuesday, CA Associate Justice Romeo la Barja told the protesters anew in a dialogue that the court would release the decision on Jan. 23. He said such time, the protesters would continue fasting in front of the YMCA building where the CA offices are located.

Liezl Bacsain, one of those fasting, said her siblings who were working in the banana plantations "were angry about what we're doing. We missed them but Christmas and New Year Bac because they saw how determined we are, they now understand what this is all about."

Bacsain said she saw how their farm animals had died and their customers refused because of the chemicals sprayed aerially in their community in Binh villages in Davao City.

"We are doing this to save not only our crops and our livelihood, but to save our community, environment and give a better future to our children to us[illegible]," she said.

Firm disconnects power in city hall; officials hit back, padlock co-op

By Carla P. Gomez
Inquirer Visayas

BACOLOD CITY—THE CENTRAL Negros Electric Cooperative (Ceneco) disconnected power to the Bacolod City Hall, seven government corners, Libertad Market and other government offices Thursday for their failure to pay some P9 million in electric bills.

In retaliation, the Bacolod city government padlocked the administrative building of Ceneco after revoking its mayor's permit because the power distributor also failed to pay its franchise taxes and real estate property taxes in the city.

Bacolod City Mayor Evelio Leonardia, in a press conference yesterday, even asked consumers to stop paying their bills to Ceneco, since the city government had already canceled the mayor's permit of the power firm.

The city failed to pay its electric bills despite billing notices sent to city hall on Dec. 19, 2008 and another reminder a few days ago, Ceneco president Nicanor Saburnay said.

It violated the compromise agreement between the city and Ceneco, he said.

Saburnay said if Ceneco went bankrupt for unbuilding the unpaid bills of the city amounting to P2 million a month, the National Power Corp. (Napocor) would cut it off and the rest of its service areas.

Allan Jayoma, Bacolod City legal officer, however, said the power disconnection could be a blessing in disguise because the city government could save more on being provided direct power connection from Napocor.

Jayoma said Ceneco did not serve the city a notice of disconnection" but only sent them a bill, which did not indicate they were given 48 hours to pay.

Leonardia called the Ceneco move an "enemy action" against the people of Bacolod.

"Their waiting till of electricity was a form of economic sabotage and was done with bad faith because there had been several talks between representatives of Ceneco and the city to find a solution," he said.

The mayor said he suspected that Ceneco was "driven by other motives" or by a "political agenda" to derail his administration.

SBMA says Subic casino fate now in DENR hands

SUBIC BAY FREEPORT—THE fate of a foreign casino-hotel project here now lies in the hands of the environment department, after it received the green of the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority to issue environmental clearance for projects in this free port, an SBMA official said.

SBMA Administrator Armand Arreza said the SBMA was redirecting the application for an environmental compliance certificate of Grand Utopia Inc. for its P320-million casino-hotel.

"The EOC for Grand Utopia is still under review. Today (Thursday), we submitted their applications to the Department of Env ir onment and Natural Resources, the agency that will decide whether to issue the ECC," Arreza told the Inquirer.

Earlier, architect and urban planner Felino Palafox Jr. insisted that he backed most of the project after he learned that more than 300 trees would be cut to give way to the project.

But Arreza said no tree would be cut in the project site, contrary to Palafox's revelations. However, a report from a survey crew commissioned by Grand Utopia showed that at least 183 trees would have to be replanted.

Arreza said the SBMA is "not concerned about Palafox's allegations at all."

"Now that the (EOC) is part of the process, people will know whether we are correct or not," he said. Robert Gonsaga, Inquirer Central Luzon

Saturday January 17, 2009 (Men's Doubles - A, B, C, D, E & F)
Sunday January 18, 2009 Doubles (Women's - A, B, C, D, E & F) & (Men's - Open & B)
Saturday January 24, 2009 (Mixed Doubles - Open A, B, C, D, E & F)
Prima Pasta Invitational Badminton Open 2009
Powersmash Badminton Court 2227 Pasong Tamo, Makati City
Entry fee: Php 800.00 / person
POWERSMASH, Makati - January 10, 2009, 2-6pm
POWERSMASH, Makati - January 17, 2009, 2-6pm
Special leveling may be scheduled for groups of 10 or more
Morning Star Milling · Edmondo · Matz Rollers · EJCmstruction · Monolith Construction · Pioneer Life

Spurs stretch Clippers slide

SAN ANTONIO—TONY PARKER SCORED 19 points as San Antonio beat the skidding Los Angeles Clippers 106-94 on Thursday, giving the Spurs their ninth win in the past 10 NBA games despite getting only eight points from Tim Duncan.

The Clippers have lost nine straight.

The Spurs, winners of three consecutive games, have a 7½-game lead over second-place New Orleans in the Southwest Division.

Roger Mason added 16 points for the Spurs. Michael Finley had 15 and Manu Ginobili 13 off the bench. Matt Bonner scored 11.

Though Duncan fell short of double figures in points and rebounds (four), he led the Spurs with nine assists.

The Clippers got 21 points each from Eric Gordon and Al Thornton.

Mavericks 99, Knicks 94

In Dallas, Josh Howard scored 31 points, Jason Kidd added 16 and Dallas overcame a subpar game from Dirk Nowitzki to beat New York.

The Mavericks have beaten the Knicks nine straight times in Dallas dating to December 1996.

Nowitzki, the NBA's fourth-leading scorer, was 2-of-13 from the floor and scored 10 points, just two more than his season low.

Knicks center Eddy Curry, who missed the first 23 games with a knee injury, played for the first time this season. He made his only shot attempt in 2:41, minutes of serious and garbled Curry rebounds.

Chris Duhon hit his first nine shots and scored 24 points. AP

SAN ANTONIO playmaker Tony Parker scores for a layup against the Los Angeles Clippers en route to scoring 19 points for the Spurs. —

Pharex battles M'nolia, tries to stay alive

By Jasmine W. Payo

AFTER PICKING UP ONLY TWO WINS IN the last two months, Pharex confronts the daunting task of stringing up three straight victories just to advance to the quarterfinal round.

The Generals drove to an upset over early semifinalist Magnolia Purewater to keep their campaign alive in the PBL PCCFlex Lindenview Cup today.

"You are giving up on my players," said Pharex coach Cielo Tan. "But we have to play a lot better to stop it from happen."

The Generals, aiming to master the form that stunned Harbour Centre and Supex, go for a must-win against the Wizards at 4 p.m. at the Southstar Halo Sports Complex in Makati.

Batchan, surprisingly running third with a 5-5 record, also tries to boost its own quarterfinal bid against the first three champion Hapee Pharex at 2 p.m.

A Pharex loss will ensure Batchan and idle Hapee Toothpaste slots in the quarterfinals.

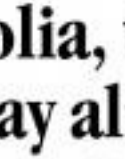
Both the Batang Pier and the Wizards have piled up seventh good enough for a outright semifinal status, the incentive given to the top two teams in the elimination round.

But the team with the worst record will be eliminated, a fate the Generals hope to avoid following their breakthrough quarterfinal run last conference.

In contrast, Batchan has turned its campaign around with a three-game streak to climb to third place.

And it's a can coach Jorge Gallent has rallies most of every if his Batang Pier reacted to an 82-80 rout of the Energy Warriors in the first round.

"We have to maintain our intensions going into the semis so we can't relax at this moment," said Gallent. "Besides, the Warriors are playing on a



cost now."

Coach Lawrence Chongson, who will also call the shots for the University of the East next season, will again rely on late addition Derrick Caballeg and UP standouts Paul Lee, Paul Lee and James Martinez.

The Batang Pier, meanwhile, aim for their 10th win in 11 outings behind Reed Juanilla, Ben Mbakwhale and Mark Barroca.

Of course, Ricky Hatton has a chance

RICKY HATTON, SO WHITTER WHAT Freddie Roach predicts, will not convert into a knockout or distant conclusion of Manny Pacquiao's last two victims.

Remember Pacquiao's sensational knockout wins against David Diaz and Oscar de la Hoya, last year?

Diaz was stunned and reduced to an ex-humanbo target, a mimic no less.

De La Hoya suffered from cold feet, unable to box as he stood frozen like a paralytic.

* * *

Well, it's easy to blame these two intimidations on Pacquiao's vesanical power and speed.

In fact, these gifts were lost time expertly enhanced by near-bound mobility and deceptiveness.

The Diaz case was foreshadowing. He prepared hard and was ritually at fail best.

Just two feet Pacquiao turned into a perfect storm that lashed with fearful, crushing fury at the sound of the bell.

* * *

The De La Hoya devastation was a totally different case.

The Golden Boy had to bluff and fat in order to sell the promotion.

He bragged and vowed he would show up to perform fighting here.

He turned came in his tightest here.

He also ended up taking boxing with him to the emergency room.

* * *

Correction: Oscar did show up looking at his best—but only for a TV segment shoot.

He loaded up on cheap make-up and crosshatched singly in turning the match into an affair to oddity.

De La Hoya also brought boxing down to its knees.

Of course, there no longer need of an ambulance to help prize-fighting back on its feet.

They no longer had to borrow a cure from Larry Merchant, the original proponent of the awful Dream Match.

* * *

No one, how would've Merchant ever suspected that De La Hoya, with his chancellor smile, had turned shallow, dishonest and unfit?

Simon Harton is not even a distant relative of Pacquiao's last two KO victims.

Freddie Roach had himself claimed that Pacquiao, this time out, will be rotating with somebody who can pull the trigger.

Not the same, Roach did come out ahead with a row that Pacquiao would stop Hatton.

Roach said the stoppage would be in the latter rounds, maybe the ninth or tenth, when Pacquiao catches Hatton.

* * *

Roach did call Hatton a live, wire, a red-hot dagger who seldom takes a step back.

That was as good as saying Hatton is a walking target, perfect for the unconditional world pound-for-pound king.

As a result, initial postings at the Hilton Las Vegas sports book yesterday placed Pacquiao a minus-225 favorite.

That means a $2.25 bet on Pacquiao would net only $1.00 if they fought today.

Based on Pacquiao's phenomenal tour to all-time greatness, the odds could just go out of kind as the fight nears.

Of course, there are a few who would put their best pennies on Hatton.

Among them is noted boxing chronicler Enrell Pesmiles, a prize-fight czar from Britain.

"Without question, Hatton is nuts to BE Pacquiao, no matter what the world says," he says.

He weighed out Pacquiao's body, "a weak spot," which has not been fully explained.

(More of this in the next column)

BARE EYE

Ricardo Trinidad

SPORTSWATCH

Dragons triumph

THE UNIVERSAL COLLEGE BOLDIN Dragons banked on crime-pronged attack to crush PATTS College of Aeronautics, 81-66, yesterday and barge into the semifinals of the 45th Sta Isreal Capital Regional Athletic Association (SCRAA) men's basketball tournament at the Pope Technological University gym.

Jeffrey Crispol, Justine Miranda and Centre Mangan chipped in double-digit points as they helped the Golden Dragons finish the elimination round with a 9-1 slate.

The Dragons now await the outcome of the Arellano Chiefs' last two games against the Manila Applicable College Seminole and the La Salle-Dasmariñas Patriots to find out their place in the semis.

A victory for the Chiefs will have the Lasallians eliminated from the semifinal finals and, while the Golden Dragons will have to go through a stepladder elimination phase.

Arellano bounced PATTS College of Aeronautics, 83-73, recently to nab control to an NCRAA three-peat.

NCA preseason slated

THE NATIONAL COCKEY-ALLIANCE (NCA) will hold a press conference on Monday at the Manila Polo Republic Club Shangrila Hotel to announce the World Quarter Championship Derby.

The press conference will feature the top American cockers who have arrived in Manila for the NCA World Quarter Championship Derby on Jan. 13, 15, and 17, 2009 at the Fiesta Center in Pasig City.

Prominent cockers who have joined forces with their American counterparts for the international event. Among the cockers who forged ties Gary Nevers with George Torres, Hector Fleckenstein, Lennie Campbell, and former Dong Claudio Bautista. Jr. Magsaysay with Dennis Yorkmen; the Teddy Concepcion's Larry Whitehead, Joe Whitehead, Dan Fry, and Lloyd Stewart; the Gilmanglaran Group with Mickey Talbert and Ty Talbert; Fiesta Resources with Wayne Sparkuck, and Patrick Kilcrease with Joe Santos.

Xavier kicks off title defense

XAVIER SCHOOL (SMITH 15 TITLE-retention) bid against Hope Christian High School on the 70000 Mandaluyong Metro Manila Young Lao Basketball Association Tournament-uneraas today at the UNO High School gym.

A short but colorful opening ceremony set at 12 noon precedes the explosive triple-header with PBL Commissioner Chino Trinidad-to-bed as one of the guest speakers of the annual tournament among the country's premier 16 Chinese schools.

Throughout Golden Stallions will be without prolific forward Sukhbir Bansi the San Juan-based school remains as the overwhelming favorite when it tackles Hope Christian at 4 p.m.

Without Bansi, Jane Yang—last year's scoring champion—will take some load off coach Father Jerry Orbos' younger brother Jeryn.

Clashing in the opening game at 1 p.m. are this year's two Gold and 2007 champion Chiang Kai Shek while St. Stephen collides with St. Jude at 2:30 p.m.

Peñalosa takes on 'Boom Boom' conqueror

WORLD BOXING ORGANIZATION (WBO) bantamweight champion Jonny Peñalosa takes on Mexico's Heriberto Ruiz in a 10-round battle to highlight a big boxing event on Feb. 21 in Manchester City.

The card will also feature two of the Philippines' top lightweights—undefeated Rolando Magbanua of Pagsanjan, Ilocos Sur, and Andy Morales of Bacolor, Pampanga del Sur, who will figure in two WBO regional titles.

Morales, 21, with a record of 11 wins (9 KOs) and 1 draw, will fight reigning WBO Asia Pacific lightweight titleholder Jason Egera, also a Filipino.

Magbanua, 23, who has a record of 13 wins (8 KOs), will go up against a still unnamed foreign opponent for the WBO Oriental title.

Peñalosa's appearance in the card originally intended to feature only Mitchiam's top professional boxers was finalized on Thursday following a meeting with MB-CBN executive Jesse Jimenez and North Cotabato Vice Gov. Manny Pinol.

The Fight Night will be Peñalosa's 8-rated tune-up prior to his defense of the WBO featherweight title against Mexico's Eric Morel in April.

It will not be an easy fight for Peñalosa. Ruiz is the same seasoned Mexican operator who last time beat Jhay "Boom Boom" Bacarro.

Pinol, who manages both Marcos and Magbanua, said at least six more commanding fighters from Mindanao will see action in the Feb. 21 card, which will be televised live by MBC-CBN and carried by overseas viewers by The Filipino Channel.

Also seeing action are: flyweight Elena Gonzales, 23, (8 wins, 4 KOs, 3 draws); featherweight Lorenzo Villanueva, 22, (11 wins with 11 KOs); bantamweight Glenn Ferrer, 23, (10 wins, 12 KOs, 2 losses); junior flyweight Eddie Bugtalong, 25, (16 wins, 12 KOs, 2 losses); junior welterweight Rommel Asenjo, 19, (11 wins, 8 KOs, 2 losses); and Jr flyweight Jovanie Abad, 20, (9 wins with 5 KOs).

Jacob Trinidad

Japanese foils Lazaro's double tennis title bid

By Marc Anthony Reyes

SOMETHING BAD HAPPENED ON the way to Leandro Lazaro's double-title bid yesterday.

The second favorite was prodigy was ambushed by gritty Japanese assassin Takehiro Ozgami, 6-2, 3-6, 7-5, in the semifinals of the consequence boys 16-under of the 20th Interhigh Cup age group championships at the Rizal Memorial Tennis Center.

The back-to-back 14-under champ, who last year also bagged the 18-under title, blew a 5-1 lead over the unseeded Ozugami in the third set and later blamed a lesion on his right leg for his shocking collapse.

Ozugami fought back and held seven in the seventh game of the deciding set before breaking Lazaro in the next for 5-3. At that pivotal juncture, Lazaro was seen already wanting to his problematic leg.

The pressed to be the better player was there. I did my best to win," said the 15-year-old Lazaro.

The Japanese, who will take on top seed Michael Jairus Rubeo of Peru in the finals, outexploited patience behind the baseline while occasionally jolting Lazaro with forays to the net.

Exhausted and frustrated, Lazaro pointed match points with a double fault after one hour and 20 minutes.

Hallow turned back third seed Phil Nicole Magsaysay 6-4, 6-0, in the other semifinal to emerge today's final duel.

Patricia Joy Orteza, meanwhile, bowed to Japan's Ai Ozawa, 6-2, 6-2, in the girls' 18-under semifinals.

Orteza reached the semis by whipping last seed Jessica Lee 6-1, 6-0 in the quarterfinals Thursday—another bad a bye and two walk-overs along the way.

But she ran out of luck against the power-hitting Ozawa who will have crossed swords with Filipina-Japanese Natalie Higashizaki, 6-3, 7-5.

Yhico Mark Take-Take stomped the boys 12-under championship after hosting second seed Christian Jan Andrew 6-2, 6-4. The unseeded Take-Take marched to the finals with big opens over top seed Yhico Jakin and fourth seed Alberto Lee Jr.

MICHAEL James Hakeos of Peru hits a return shot against AP's Paul Magsaysay

SPORTS

SEAN MIGUEL, big man Dorian Pena (No. 4) crowds to reach for a loose ball against Gimbo's Sunday Salvacion.

Realtors oust Painters; Kings force KO match

By Marcus R. Castillo

STA. LUCIA PUT AN END TO RAIN OR Shine's best run in a conference (five for, homecoming and a 92-83 quarterfinal victory last night that ousted the Elasto Painters from the KFC-PBA Philippine Cup of the Cuneta Astrodome.

Jolly Williams knocked in a big triple in the stretch, giving the Realtors an 83-77 cushion that was enough to send the defending champions straight into a semifinal series vs Alaska.

Sta. Lucia thus ended Rain or Shine's impressive run—the young franchise had never made it to the quarterfinals before—with a 2-1 sweep of their best-of-three series.

Ramogen Gimbo, on the other hand, turned a scorching performance by San Miguel's Dondon Hontiveros as the Kings forged a knockout quarterfinal match against the Beermen with a 95-88 victory in the second game.

San Miguel and Gimbo are tied at 1-1 and will play on Friday at 6 p.m. at the Cuneta Astrodome to decide which team advances opposite Talk 'N Text in the semifinals.

"We just survived to play another game," Gimbo coach Jong Uichico said.

Meanwhile, Air21 president Lim Ah-ree yesterday said that he sees no problem when his team assumes the name of Burger King starting with the Fiesta Cup on Feb. 28.

Ah-ree said he can provide documents that show that Air21 franchise owner Bert Lina owns 60 percent of Burger King in the Philippines and hence ...

In another development, negotiations are ongoing between Go Hotpad and Coca-Cola that will have the owners Air21 executive acting as assistant of Kenneth Dominado, National coach Tong Carson, who resigned from Red Bull recently, has been tabbed to handle Air21/Burger King.

The scores:

First Game

SAN MIGUEL 95— Yeng Guiao 10, Hontiveros 22, Mark Yu 12, Cabagnot 11, Ildefonso 2, Belasco 2, Arnett 6, Wilson 7, Cruz-Jaleco 2, Enabulan 0, Pascual 2, Chiaki 0

GIN KINGS 88— Hodge 12, Pena 10, Seigle 9, Pogoy 4, Wellington 2, Dandan 2, Slaughter 27, Fermin 2

Quarters: 22-16, 48-41, 70-62, 95-88

Second Game

STA. LUCIA 83— Yee 19, Lojera 10, Ayes 17, Mendoza 11, Williams 12, Dionisio 3, Gonzales 2, Mamaril 1, Dungca 0, Caguioa 6, Ilustre

RAIN OR SHINE 77— Gonzalez 17, Almazan 10, Chua 11, Reyes 10, Ilao 0, Salenga 6, Hontiveros 2, Andaya 4, Belmonte 2, Jong 1

Quarters: 20-17, 38-40, 64-60, 83-77

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Three UAAP events kick off today

By Cedell P. Tayao

WITH VOLLEYBALL SEASON CONcluded, the UAAP shifts its attention to the baseball, softball and tennis competitions, which begin this weekend in different venues in Manila.

Adamson and University of the Philippines are expected to have their hands full when they defend their baseball and softball crowns, respectively.

University of Santo Tomas is gunning for another sweep of the men and women's tennis tournaments at the Rizal Memorial Tennis Center.

But the Tigers, who are seeking a third straight crown, are expected to face stiff opposition from La Salle, whose lineup has been strengthened by the presence of RP No. 1 JO Tiewsa.

The Lady Maroons, who stunned four-time defending champion Adamson for the title last year, open their campaign against Ateneo at 9 a.m. at the UST basketball in Espana, Manila.

The odds of a repeat are stacked against the Lady Maroons, who lost standout pitcher Denise Macasa and four other key players to graduation.

Macasa was the Most Valuable Player, best pitcher and best slugger last year.

RACING TIPS

By Top Choice
At Santa Ana Park

Aplus METRO
Editor Alexander S. Lhuillier

Database for Navotas youth

THE NAVOTAS City government is collating a database of the city's young population, aged 0-18, to draw up specific programs and investments for them. It has also formed a children's council that would specifically recommend and implement local laws and investments for the development and special protection of its children. *Beverly T. Katrichal*

Angry over money, hubby stabs wife 16x, then kills self

Casserole filled with burning cash found near woman's body, cops say

By Allison W. Lopez

IN A FIT OF RAGE REPORTEDLY OVER MONEY, A 63-year-old American stabbed dead his Filipina wife before hanging himself in their Makati City home on Thursday afternoon.

Philip von Theren, a pensioner carrying a US passport, was found dead inside a storeroom on the second floor of their house on Arnaiz Street, Bgy. Olympia Village, reliable tips with Alexa Lucasjar his dead in a pool of blood near the kitchen.

The 200-year-old woman who suffered 16 stab wounds was declared dead on arrival at the Ospital ng Makati at 5:25 p.m.

Insp. Teresa Dizo, head of the Makati Police Department homicide section, said the couple's neighbors, Alaiza Almanzor and Imelda Crespo, were about to give food from a birthday celebration to the Von Therens when their 7-year-old adopted son came crying to the gate and shouting, "Manza, Mamza, gang!"

"When they were able to open the gate, they saw the bloodied Lumapas on the ground floor while nearby was a casserole filled with burning money," Dizo told the Inquirer in Filipino.

The witnesses quickly put out the small fire, rushed the victim to the hospital, and reported the matter to police.

Dizo said the cops who responded to the scene searched for Von Theren and found him in the washroom with an electrical cord tied to his neck. They failed to revive him.

Police also recovered a fan knife, the weapon allegedly used in the killing.

Lumapas's sister Marilyn told the Inquirer she received a text message from Alexa saying that Philip was again whining about his illness and urged someone to come over.

"When I replied, she texted back and said Kuya (Philip) kicked her and threw a pushcart at her face. She stopped texting afterward until I learned about the incident," said Marilyn in Filipino.

As far as she knows, Marilyn said the foreigner constantly complained about pains in his legs and had tried to commit suicide twice.

She said that after Christmas, she had also talked to Philip who claimed that the "devil" had been urging him to take his own life.

Dizo said she went very hesitant suffering from a psychological illness, apart from his physical ailments.

WHERE'S THE DRIVER? That's what a traffic aide wonders as he admires an pedestrians check out an elderly man who got run over by this Sampaguita bus along Edsa in Cubao, Quezon City, seven day right after the victim alighted from another bus. The driver and bus conductor fled after the incident, witnesses said. Story on A 16. ALEX LUARCA

Grade 5 pupil claims teacher repeatedly raped her in school

By Erika Sauler

MANDALUYONG POLICE HAS arrested a 42-year-old teacher on charges that he repeatedly raped a Grade 5 pupil in the school's comfort room since June last year.

The teacher, Orville Portares, allegedly threatened the 12-year-old girl with failing grades if she refused his advances but also tried to bribe her with money, cell phone and iPod to keep her silent.

MPD Chief Rodolfo Magsaysay said the teacher, legal, which confirmed that the girl's hymen had deep healed laceration, served as "primetime" witness evidence against the suspect. A rape case had been filed with the city prosecutor's office on Tuesday, a day after Portares's arrest.

The case apparently shocked Mandaluyong City Mayor Benjamin "Benhur" Abalos Jr. that his office provided legal assistance to the girl's family and ordered her immediate transfer to another school within the city.

The alleged victim's mom lodged a complaint on Jan. 3 at the city police's Women and Children Protection Desk when

CRIMES, W 9

Eco groups up in arms over plan to build new San Mateo landfill

By DJ Yap

ENVIRONMENT GROUPS AND concerned residents of San Mateo, Rizal, are up in arms over a proposal to build a new landfill in a forested part of the town, which would purportedly become the dumping ground of a portion of Metro Manila's garbage.

The Coalition for a Garbage-Free San Mateo, a newly formed group, said the proposed construction of a 200-hectare landfill in Barangay Maly and Guinayang would "visit the infamous Payatas garbage dump" in Quezon City.

It said the landfill would be used as the dumping ground of wastes from the town, neighboring municipalities and even Metro Manila, which said to dump its garbage on the existing San Mateo landfill until the Supreme Court ordered it shut in 2000.

EcoWaste Coalition and Greenpeace also indicated their opposition to the project, which they said is located in an environmentally critical area since it is linked to the Wawa/Marikina watershed and drains into the Laguna Lake.

Bel Bonaligan, coordinator of EcoWaste, said his group is preparing documents for the possible filing of a complaint against the developers for violation of Republic Act 9003, or the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act.

RC Dimatatac, a Greenpeace campaigner, said their organization was also looking at the project closely because of its probable links to bodies of water.

Sought for comment, town officials connected to the project were unavailable for comment...and at press time, had not returned the reporter's calls.

Greg Ibarra, a concerned citizen and a leader of the protest movement, said the landfill is to be built by the San Mateo Sanitary Landfill and Development Corp., a company formed on Sept. 11, 2007.

Done in secrecy

"The construction of the dumpsite was done in secrecy and with inherent haste, in utter disregard of Rep. Act No. 9003," she said in an e-mail to the reporter.

According to Ibarra, the company secured an environmental clearance certificate from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources ostensibly for the construction of the dump in Sitio Mahitog in Brgy. Guinayang Pintong Bukawe.

But from the beginning, she said the company had intended to put up the dump not in Pintong Bukawe but in Barangays Maly and Guinayang, which, according to Ibarra, is a protected forest area.

"The 39 ha. initial phase was actually built on a private property in Barangay Guinayang, several kilometers away from Pintong Bukawe, responsible to 200 ha or almost half of the 475-ha. protected forest area where fully completed," she said.

Quoting the Land Use Plan of San Mateo, Ibarra said "the protection forest area is found in the northern, middle, and eastern portion of the municipality, particularly in Barangays Maly Guinayang, Malanday, Bubong Bayan II, Guitnangbayan II and Pintong Bukawe."

"These are the areas which slope above 30 percent which based on PD 705 and RA No. 7586 should be put under permanent forest cover by virtue of their environmentally critical nature, i.e., being prone to such natural hazards as landslides, erosion, mass wasting and soil creep," she said.

Grade 5 pupil ...
Viewpage A11

she learned about the incidence of rape through the text messages sent by the teacher to the girl's cell phone.

In a statement, the girl said she was allowed almost every day and excelled on dates when the alleged rapes occurred inside the school's outdoor rooms.

The girl said that when she was in Grade 4, the teacher, who was then her class adviser, told her, "Pareh ikaw ang mag-ing girlfriend! Tara! Samapa! na kitang pare-pareho ng mga kaibigan ko or sa teacher ng mga Grade 3 (Can you be my girlfriend? I'm liked you for so long that's why) asked your Grade 3 teacher to put you under my class."

He was also quoted as saying, "Babagsak ka pag hindi ka! (be promoted as grade to) well but you (if you don't do what I want)."

The girl claimed she was raped in the mornings of June 16, June 17, June 23, and June 30 and in the afternoons of Dec. 20. The last incident happened on Jan. 7 when the teacher even allegedly said "Pasa pa rin tayo ha? (Let's do it again later)."

The teacher, who was detained at the Muntinlupa City police station, denied the allegations and refused to talk further.

'DARNA' IN QUIAPO
A man dressed as movie character "Darna" sticks smiles from devotees of the Black Nazarene as they wait for the procession near Quiapo church during yesterday's celebration of the annual feast of the nonarenazarene.

Support for the Dela Pazes wasted

THE WILLINGNESS OF THE De la Pazes to have an amicable settlement with the Dagupan mayor is very disappointing.

Raymund Fortun, lawyer of businessman Delfin de la Paz and his 34-year-old son Bryan, said his client wanted the suspension of Agrarian Reform Secretary Nasser Pangandaman put off to pave the way for an out-of-court settlement.

The public outcry against abusive government officials, symbolized by the Pangandaman, has gone to seed.

Public support for the De la Pazes has been wasted for their refusal to enforce their grievance in court.

* * *

The De la Pazes are no different from other Filipinos who cry for justice and then keep silent later when their oppressors pay them off.

I'm not saying the De la Pazes are asking for a financial settlement from the Pangandaman. I'm just saying they're no different from the rest.

I'm reminded of a man who came to us at "Kuha-Kuha" Coalition and Government also indicated their opposition to the project, which they said is located in an environmentally critical area since it is linked to the Wawa/Marikina watershed and drains into the Laguna Lake.

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Catholic church may lose property in QC

By Julie M. Aurelio

A CATHOLIC CHURCH IN QUEZON City may lose its property after the city treasurer's office auctioned off a 3,000 square meter lot in Culiat last month due to the failure of the former owner to pay its taxes.

City treasurer Victor Endriga said the Viatorian of the Lord parish reportedly owns the lot formerly owned by a certain Augusto Reyes of 3 Bidgal Street.

"A councilor told me that a Catholic church was built on the property. Since that may pose a problem to someone already over the auction," Endriga said in a phone interview.

But councilor Jenny Sierra said it was the church's responsibility to inform the city government of the change in ownership.

"It's their problem, not the city government's. Otherwise, we wouldn't know that a church has been built on the lot," he said.

The lot on Edsa Guevin Street in Barangay E. Rodriguez has a total land are of 3,406 sq. m and was later awarded to a Pacita Gonzales, who bidded P1.45 million.

Endriga said the old owner of the lot should have informed the city treasurer's office first of the property's sale to the church.

"We didn't know that there was a church there. The owners should have informed the city government of their intention to change the classification to a tax exempt property," he said.

He claimed the original owners sold the property in 1985 and that the city government was unaware that a church was built on the lot.

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Crackdown on guns

THE SOUTHERN Police District (SPD) ordered a crackdown on loose firearms in the cities of Caloocan, Malabon, Navotas and Valenzuela in the light of the increase in the number of stray bullet victims in the area during the New Year revelry. SPD director Chief Supt. Eric Javier said not only are unlicensed firearms suspected to be the cause of many of the stray bullets fired during the revelry; they also account for most of the shooting incidents recorded in the past year. Javier also asked Caloocan residents to surrender their illegal guns to authorities. **Beverly T. Bahnlatel**

Run over on Edsa

A MAN who just got off from a bus on a loading and unloading bay of Metro Manila Development Authority along Edsa in Cubao, Quezon City, was killed after being run over by another bus going in the same direction yesterday morning. MMDA traffic enforcer Rolando Isada said the incident took place at around 10:30 near the Metro Light Rail station in Cubao. He said the victim was walking toward the MRT station's exam when he was struck by a speeding Sampaguita bus bore with plate number TYL 943. Saliva described the victim to be medium built and between 35 and 40 years old. He also revealed that the bus driver and the conductor did not help the victim and instead immediately fled from the scene. He further said the victim was brought to East Avenue Medical Center. By MMDA's medical team. **Ken Cervantes**

Franco death anniversary

THE NATIONAL Historical Institute and Manila City Government will lead the commemoration of the 112th death anniversary of Dominga Franco tomorrow at the Plaza Moriones, Tondo, Manila. Mayor Alfredo S. Lim will lead in the wreath-laying rites in the said event together with Barangay Chair Mo Clancy P. Bautista. Mr. Executive Director Ludovico D. Badoy will also grace the event. Ms. Celia Diaz, great granddaughter of Dominga Franco will give a short message.

Madoff 'victims' do math, realize they profited

NEW YORK—THE MANY Bernard Madoff investors who withdrew money from their accounts over the years are now wrestling with an ethical and legal quandary.

What they thought were profits were likely money stolen from other clients in what prosecutors are calling the largest Ponzi scheme in history. Now, they are confronting the possibility they may have to pay some of it back.

The issue came to the fore front this week as about 4,000 former Madoff clients began to receive letters inviting them to apply for up to $500,000 in aid from the Securities Investor Protection Corp.

Lawyers for investors have been warning clients to do some rough math before they apply for any funds set aside for true victims, and figure out whether they were a winner or loser in the scheme.

Hundreds and maybe thousands of investors in Madoff's funds have been withdrawing money from their accounts for many years. In many cases, these investors have withdrawn far more than their principal investment.

"I had a call yesterday from a guy who said, 'I've taken out more money than I originally put in, but I still had $1 million, left with Madoff. Should I file a $1 million claim?'" said Steven Caruso, a New York attorney specializing in securities and investment fraud.

"I'm hard-pressed to give advice in that situation," Caruso said.

Among the options: Go to bed with other victims looking for restitution, keep quiet and hope nobody notices. Return the money. Or hire a lawyer and fight to keep profits that were probably fraudulent.

No one knows yet how many people will emerge as net winners in the scandal, but the numbers appear to be substantial. Many of Madoff's longterm investors have, over time, pulled out millions of dollars of their supposed profits, which routinely amounted to 11 percent to 15 percent per year.

Jonathan Levitt, a New Jersey attorney who represents several former Madoff clients, said more than half of the victims who called his office looking for help have turned out to be people whose long-term profits exceeded their principal investments.

"There are a lot of net winners," he said.

Asked for an example, Levitt said one caller, whom he declined to name, invested $1.8 million with Madoff more than a decade ago, then cashed out nearly $3 million worth of "profits" at the point went bust.

On paper, he still had $4 million remaining with Madoff when the scheme collapsed, but is now looks as if that figure was almost entirely comprised of fictitious profits on investments that were never actually made, leaving his claim to be owed anything unclear.

Other attorneys report getting similar calls.

Under federal law, the court-appointed trustee trying to unravel Madoff's business can demand that people who profited from the scheme return some or all of the money. AP

US halts 2 Ponzi schemes

WASHINGTON—THE US GOVernment took action on Thursday in halt two Ponzi schemes as investors continue to reel from the fallout of accused swindler Bernard Madoff's alleged $50-billion fraud.

Securities and Futures regulators charged a Philadelphia-area fund manager with operating a $100-million Ponzi fraud, in which he paid off early investors with money from later investors, officials said.

In a separate case, authorities charged an 82-year-old man with allegedly running a $17-million Ponzi scheme where he targeted the elderly and members of the Catholic community, including priests, religious orders and parishioners, officials said.

The charges come almost a month after Madoff was arrested for allegedly swindling billions from investors, banks and charities. The Securities and Exchange Commission has been criticized for failing to detect Madoff's alleged fraud.

On Thursday, the SEC and the Commodity Futures Trading Commission alleged that 53-year-old Joseph S. Forte operated investment returns in his investment even though he consistently lost money, withdrew millions of dollars in fees for himself and used investors' funds to repay other investors.

Forte claimed he was a successful commodity futures trader and that his fund had a successful track record, the CFTC said.

He was never registered with the SEC, nor was his fund registered with the CFTC.

According to the government complaints, Forte conducted the Ponzi scheme since at least February 1995 and collected about $58 million from as many as 86 investors, including at least one charity, to participate in a commodity Futures pool.

The SEC complaint said that last last month, Forte admitted to federal authorities that he had been conducting the Ponzi scheme and that he did not have the funds to repay investors.

Separately, the SEC and the Department of Justice charged 62-year-old Richard Picotti with running an alleged Ponzi scheme using his companies, Geo Sec Capital Corp. and Geo Unlimited. Picotti advertised almost exclusively in Catholic newspapers, authorities said.

Acting on the complaints, the New York resident promised investors a guaranteed annual return of 7.1 percent for a $5,000 investment, with a higher rate of return for larger investments. However, Picotti did not invest the funds and instead used investors' funds to make payments owed to other investors, authorities said. *Reuters*

PASSING OF AN AGE
In this Jan. 14, 1963, photo, President John Kennedy delivers his State of the Union report to a joint session of Congress. Behind the president are House Speaker John McCormick, (right), and Vice President Lyndon Johnson. When George Bush, on Inauguration Day, leaves Washington on a helicopter—a make-way for Barack Obama, he may not be the only thing disappearing into the horizon. To a number of social analysts, historians, bloggers and ordinary Americans, Jan. 20 will symbolize the passing of an entire generation: the baby boomer years. AP

Sri Lanka troops inside strategic Elephant Pass

COLOMBO—SRI LANKAN TROOPS ARE fighting inside Elephant Pass, the strategic gateway to the Jaffna Peninsula held by the separatist Tamil Tiger rebels, the government said on Friday.

"We have captured it. We are moving in and fighting is going on," defense spokesperson Nihalsiri Ranibahodhi, who is also a minister, told Reuters. Some media reports said it had been captured, but Ranabahodhi said that was premature.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) could not be reached for comment, but have previously vowed to reverse a string of defeats that have prompted many to ask if a ground war that started in 1983 is finally nearing its end.

The former army base is an triumph as it is symbolic for the military. Its capture will put all of Jaffna in government hands for the first time since 1990, when the army lost Elephant Pass to one of its worst defeats in the 25-year war.

It will also open up the main north-south A-9 road linking Jaffna to the mainland, freeing up a mechanized division to join the battle now moving east toward the LTTE's last stronghold in the eastern part of Mullaitivu and its environs.

The LTTE have been fighting one of Asia's longest insurgencies to create a separate state for Sri Lanka's minority Tamils, many of whom complain of discrimination since the Sinhalese ethnic majority took over at independence from Britain in 1948.

But many Sinhalese say Tamils enjoyed undue advantages in terms of education and government jobs in colonial times.

The Tigers are on US, EU and Indian terrorist lists after carrying out hundreds of assassinations and suicide bombings, including against Tamils who challenged them.

The bulk of ethnically Tamil Jaffna has been under military control since 1995, but the Tigers had until this week held a mineand bodies-strewn 12 km-by-4 km strip on the narrow neck connecting to the mainland.

All that changed when the army captured the rebels' self-proclaimed capital of Kilinochchi a week ago, which freed up three divisions of soldiers to attack the Jaffna theatre from the north and south simultaneously.

The military and analysts have said the Tigers have been moving their heavy weapons and inside landmark personnel evacuated to counter-attack 2,000 toward Mullaitivu, facing heavy odds in both Kilinochchi and Jaffna.

Caught in the war zone on what aid groups estimate to be around 230,000 civilians who called their homes.

Rights groups say the Tigers do not let them leave and use them as human shields, forcible conscripts and battlefield laborers. Those that do escape, end up in government camps where they face scrutiny as LTTE sympathizers, rights groups say.

President Mahinda Rajapaksa says the government is committed to keeping civilian safe, upon which the interest-bind community and giant neighbor India insist. The LTTE denies it uncovers civilians and says they support their cause. *Reuters*

Physicist applies for sweeper's job

SEOUL—A JOBLESS SCIENTIST with a doctorate in physics has applied for a cleaner-sweeper's job, reflecting the severe economic downturn and rising unemployment, officials said on Friday.

The 36-year-old physicist was among 62 people who applied for five openings as sweepers, Seoul's Gangnam District Office said. Eleven of the applicants were university graduates, it said.

"I doubt whether any doctorate degree will be of any help to become a sweeper," Chong Young-ik, an official in charge, said.

"He must have been in a very desperate situation to seek this job but we are selecting new sweepers, not scientists," he said.

The district office said competition had become tougher this year for the sweeper jobs, with an average 12.8 people eyeing for each opening.

Applicants in 15 families with $20,000 starting salary for a sweeper is greater than what inexperienced college graduates earn at large businesses, Chong said. AFP

Major flu strain found resistant to leading drug

PITTSBURGH—THE DOMINANT strain of flu in the United States this season is resistant to the leading antiviral drug Tamiflu, and scientists and health officials are trying to figure out why.

The problem is not yet a public health crisis because this has been a below-average flu season so far, and because the Tamiflu resistance is one of three circulating, is still susceptible to other drugs. But infectious disease specialists are worried nonetheless.

Last winter, about 11 percent of the throat swabs from patients with the most common type of flu that were sent to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for genetic typing showed a Tamiflu resistance strain. This season, 99 percent do.

"It's quite shocking," said Dr. Kent A. Stephenitis, director of infection control at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York. "We've never lost an antimicrobial this fast. It blew me away."

The single mutation that creates Tamiflu resistance appears to be spontaneous, and not a reaction to overuse of the drug. It may have occurred in Asia, and it was widespread in Europe last year. In response, the disease control agency issued new guidelines two weeks ago. They urged doctors to test suspected flu cases as quickly as possible so see if they are influenza A or influenza B, and if they are A, whether they are H1 or H3 strains.

Complicating the problem, antiviral drugs work only if they are taken within the first 48 hours of infection. A patient with severe flu could be given the wrong drug and die of pneumonia before test results come in. So the new guidelines suggest that doctors check with their state health departments to see which strains are most common locally and treat for those.

"We're a busy hospital, and we don't even do the A versus B test in a timely fashion," Stephenitis said.

If a Tamiflu-resistant strain is suppressed, the CDC suggests using a similar drug, Relenza. But Relenza is harder to take and is not recommended for children under 7. NYT

Panel votes to unanimously impeach governor

SPRINGFIELD, IL—AN INVESTIGative committee of the Illinois House voted unanimously on Thursday to recommend the impeachment of Gov. Rod R. Blagojevich.

The action by the 21-member bipartisan committee, which began hearings last month, cleared the way for an impeachment vote by the full House, expected on Friday. A majority vote there would send the matter to the Senate for trial, where two-thirds approval would remove the governor.

Lucio Guerrero, a spokesperson for Blagojevich, called the committee's vote "a foregone conclusion."

BLAGOJEVICH

"The governor believes that the proceedings were flawed, biased and did not follow the rules of law," said Guerrero, who noted that Blagojevich's lawyers had not been allowed they are to examine the committee's witnesses or call witnesses of their own. This, he said, impinged on the governor's right to due process.

The vote by the panel, which heard an abuse of power by Blagojevich to the ordinary work of government, followed testimony before the lawmakers earlier in the day by the leading figure in another drama swirling around him.

That witness, Roland W. Burris, named by Blagojevich to succeed President-elect Barack Obama in the US Senate, once again said he had made no promise nor given any promises to Blagojevich in exchange for the appointment. Blagojevich, a second-term Democrat, announced his selection of Burris last week, widely seen as a defiant gesture by the governor. NYT

US Army recruiting with video games

PHILADELPHIA—THE US army, struggling to ensure it has enough manpower as it fights wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, is arming young Americans with video games. Called "America's Army," the simulated attacks on enemy positions from an Apache helicopter.

Departing from the recruiting environment of metal tables and uniformed soldiers in a dark military building, the Army has installed 12 video games in a facility that looks like a cross between a food lobbying and a video arcade.

The US Army Experience Center at the Franklin Mills shopping mall in northeast Philadelphia has 60 personal computers loaded with military video games, 10 Xbox 360 video game controllers and copies of interactive scenes describing military basic and career options in great detail.

Potential recruits can hang out, on couches and listen to rock music that fills the space.

The center is the first of its kind and opened in August as part of a new push to expand its flo, it has signed up 33 full-time soldiers and five reservists...roughly matching the performance of five traditional recruiting centers it replaced.

The US military says it has been meeting or exceeding its recruiting and retention goals, with 165,000 men and women entering active duty military service in the fiscal year that ended on Sept. 30...the highest number since 2003.

Defense officials say the recession and rising unemployment were likely to boost recruiting.

The Philadelphia center hires recruits with a separate team for prospective soldiers to "flee" from a real Humvee or convoy encampments projected on a 4.3-meter-high battleground scenario that also has deafening sound effects.

In another room, there is chance to attack from above can join helicopter raids in which enemy soldiers emerge from hideouts to be killed by automatic gunfire coming from a simulated machine gun on an Apache or Blackhawk helicopter.

The Army is not simply looking for gamers, said Fire Sgt. Randy Arrington, who runs the center. It also aims to dispel misperceptions about Army life. *Reuters*

A POSSIBLE recruit tries an Apache helicopter flight simulator. The US Army is wooing young Americans with video games, Google maps and simulated attacks on enemy from an Apache helicopter. REUTERS

The WORLD

Lira Lorenne B. Dueza

Democrats buck Obama stimulus plan

WASHINGTON—PRESIDENT-ELECT BARACK Obama's economic recovery plan ran into misfire from his own party in Congress on Thursday, suggesting that quick passage of spending programs and tax cuts could require more time and negotiation than Democrats once hoped.

Senate Democrats complained that major components of his plan were not bold enough and urged more focus on creating jobs and rebuilding the nation's energy infrastructure rather than cutting taxes.

Just hours earlier, Obama called for speedy passage of the economic stimulus measure, warning that the recession "could linger for years" if Congress did not pass his plan within weeks.

Further complicating the picture, Democratic senators said on Thursday they would try to attach legislation to the package that would allow bankruptcy courts to modify home loans, a course that Republicans have opposed.

Obama has been assembling a package worth as much as $775 billion over two years to revive the sagging economy, using the plan to define his presidency even before it begins and to broadcast to his broader approach to governing.

While relying on traditionally liberal notions of using government spending to spur growth, he has also tried to adapt it for a new era with investment in clean energy and technology. And he is trying to balance all of that with tax breaks that appeal to Republicans.

But the broad support he has enjoyed so far for the basic concepts is now being tested as the specifics become clearer. While conservatives reinvoke the high spending, and moreover Democrats express concerns about the ballooning deficit, liberals are pushing for even more money devoted to social programs, alternative energy development and road, bridge and school construction.

David Axelrod, Obama's senior adviser, said the president-elect's team was not concerned by the emerging pushback.

"The Afghan government has always shackled its senses in this regard and seems as evil as such incidents, which only allows the war on terror from its main path and endanger our successes," the statement said.

Karzai also condemned the insurgents for deliberately using civilians as "human shields."

US forces spokesperson Col. Jerry O'Hara, responding to the president's statement, said on Thursday that 32 insurgents, including a woman, were killed during the operation.

"I am confirming to you that all killed were militants," he said. "If any civilians were involved in this operation, our sincere condolences to them and their family," O'Hara said.

Karzai, who has been leading Afghanistan since 'QS-led troops overthrew Taliban's government in 2001, has repeatedly wanted foreign forces to prevent civilian casualties.

Nearly 700 civilians were killed until October last year during operations by foreign and Afghan forces, an Afghan rights body said last month, quoting a UN estimate. Reuters

Obama

era of criticism of his plan.

"It's a stilted law process and we're willing to listen to people's ideas," Axelrod said. NYT

Sarkozy, Merkel, Blair call for new capitalism

PARIS—THE LEADERS OF France and Germany appeared to have put disagreements over economic policy behind them, calling on the US to join global efforts to address the financial crisis.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy leading a two-day rendezvous with former British Prime Minister Tony Blair on the future of capitalism, said the crisis has shown that no country can go it alone on economic policy.

"In the 21st century, there it is no longer a single nation who can say what we should do or what we should think," he said on Thursday.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said the summit "cannot continue as it is" and called for better-regulated financial markets.

European leaders will meet in Berlin before the G-20 summit in London to decide a common approach as global leaders gear up for a second meeting on the global financial crisis, Sarkozy said.

Measures will be taken at the G-20 meeting in London on April 2, Sarkozy promised, saying "we cannot accept the status quo."

He called for closer cooperation on economic policy, saying: "We should discuss how much of us is managing its currency, his interest rates."

The leaders of France and Germany have differed in the past over how much government support Europe's economy needs.

Merkel deplored huge debts that governments are accumulating to spend their way out of the present crisis. But she said she was worried, for the moment, that "there is no other possibility."

London should look beyond financial markets, she said, singling out the Americans' budget deficit and China's current account surplus—or trade balance—as problems upsetting the global economy.

A Congressional Budget Office report estimates that the US federal budget deficit will hit an unprecedented $1.2 trillion for the 2009 budget year—and that is before President-elect Barack Obama's sweeping stimulus package is unleashed.

European governments have agreed to let flexible share budget rules that limit deficits to 3 percent of gross domestic product as recession bites. Merkel is planning an extra stimulus of up to 50 billion euros ($70 billion) and Sarkozy said on Thursday he is considering additional measures.

French Finance Minister Christine Lagarde said on Thursday Paris is planning to inject a second tranche of 10.5 billion euros into some of the nation's largest banks in an effort to spur lending.

Merkel said the International Monetary Fund has not managed to regulate global capitalism, and she called for the creation of an economy body at the United Nations, similar to the Security Council, to judge government policy. AP

Afghans say US-led raid killed 17 civilians

KABUL—AFGHAN PRESIDENT Hamid Karzai condemned on Thursday a US-led coalition military operation that his office said killed 17 civilians, including women and children.

The US military said only militants had been killed in the operation, which it said was directed at the Taliban's roadside bomb network in the eastern Laghman province.

In a separate incident three civilians were killed and nine others injured by a suicide bomb attack that targeted a NATO convoy in the Musahi district of Kandahar province, in southern Afghanistan, the district police chief said.

Civilian deaths caused by foreign troop operations when hunting militants have undermined support for foreign forces and are a sore point between the Afghan government and its allies.

"Based on the reports, during a coalition operation, 17 civilians including women and children were killed among militants in Laghman province," Afghan President Hamid Karzai said in a statement.

"The Afghan government has always shackled its senses in this regard and seems as evil as such incidents, which only allows the war on terror from its main path and endanger our successes," the statement said.

Karzai also condemned the insurgents for deliberately using civilians as "human shields."

US forces spokesperson Col. Jerry O'Hara, responding to the president's statement, said on Thursday that 32 insurgents, including a woman, were killed during the operation.

"I am confirming to you that all killed were militants," he said. "If any civilians were involved in this operation, our sincere condolences to them and their family," O'Hara said.

Karzai, who has been leading Afghanistan since 'QS-led troops overthrew Taliban's government in 2001, has repeatedly wanted foreign forces to prevent civilian casualties.

Nearly 700 civilians were killed until October last year during operations by foreign and Afghan forces, an Afghan rights body said last month, quoting a UN estimate. Reuters

HOLIDAY SIGHTS AND SOUNDS AT THE SM MALLS

If you and your family spent the rest of the holidays in your hometown or in your favorite vacation's spot out of town, one attraction you surely didn't miss were the spectacular holiday displays at the SM Supermalls.

Inspired by traditional symbols like Santa, reindeers, and Christmas trees, these had a magical quality and certainly became part of your family's "Manila memories. Some of these were larger than life, and it wouldn't really be a surprise as we always celebrate the holiday season in a big way in the Philippines.

■ The Longest Line of Lanterns at SM City Pampanga. About 300 lanterns lit up the entire stretch and all four corners of SM City Pampanga. Hot wires decorations. These were symbols of the mall's commitment to light up the province with vibrant colors of economic development.

Legendary Giant Lantern maker Rolando Quiambao was tapped to accomplish this literally big task. Quiambao, whose experience spans half of the entire history of the lantern industry in Pampanga, has won many contests for his immense Giant Lanterns.

"I was overwhelmed, but at the same time excited," he says about his assignment, adding that his idea for the lanterns was to celebrate the craftsmanship of Kapampangans alongside SM City Pampanga's many years of support for the local lantern's industry.

The lanterns presented a kaleidoscope of colors, of delightful swirls and dancing light movements. Two giant lantern also accented the main facade of SM City Pampanga, giving joy and cheer to the many shoppers who were simply awed by them.

The Giant Santa at SM Marikina

■ The Giant Santa at SM City Marikina Bigthings awaited shoppers at SM City Marikina. And at 17 feet in height and 9 feet in diameter, the Giant Santa at SM City Marikina drew kids and kids-at-heart to the mall's Christmas hub near the Concourse. Made of thermpex masterfully Fred Velasquez at Candellero's Handicraft, it would be displayed in the mall until January 11, 2009.

■ The Christmas Tree Lane at SM City Baguio. SM City Baguio's 'Tree Drive glowed with the 60-meter Christmas Tree Lane featuring the Spectacle of Lights Show. There was a dazzling display of lights as the trees danced to the tune of holiday carols. Special performances by groups like the University of Cordillera Orchestra and Dance Square delighted shoppers as they walked down The Drive in the cool mountain air.

■ The Grand Gingerbread House at SM Clark was a big hit with the kids. Standing 15 feet high and 20 feet wide, it was made of wood and placed on top of a stage that resembled a chocolate cube. Surrounding the house were 6-foot-tall candy canes, 2-foot-diameter lollipops, 2-foot-tall gingerbread dolls, and other delectable candies, biscuits, cookies and chocolates.

The Gingerbread House at SM Clark was a big hit with the kids.

The Lanterns presented a kaleidoscope of colors, of delightful swirls and wispy light movements that seemed to dance in the night.

The Christmas Tree Lane at SM City Baguio.

SM City Clark. Kids had a magical experience at SM City Clark's Gingerbread House. Standing 15 feet high and 20 feet wide, it was made of wood and placed on top of a stage that resembled a chocolate cube. Surrounding the house were 6-foot-tall candy canes, 2-foot-diameter lollipops, 2-foot-tall gingerbread dolls, and other delectable candies, biscuits, cookies and chocolates.

Longest line of lanterns lit on the entire 1 km stretch of SM City Pampanga.

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BUSINESS

GADGETS 2GO? r sun

BSP likely to slash key policy rates anew

By Michelle V. Rosca

THE BANGKO SENTRAL NG PILIPINAS MAY AGAIN SLASH its key policy rates by as much as 50 basis points when its Monetary Board meets on Jan. 29.

According to New York-based think tank Global Source, easing inflationary pressures will allow the central bank to loosen its monetary stance and support efforts to pump-prime the economy amid a global crisis.

Annual inflation slowed down to 8 percent in December from 9.9 percent in November.

Unexpected price movements at the time caught some economists off guard. They earlier predicted that inflation would revert to a single-digit level only by the end of the first quarter of 2009.

Inflation eased when oil prices began to fall in the world market. After reaching historic highs of over $147 a barrel in July last year, oil prices dropped to the $40-a-barrel territory due to weakening demand—an offshoot of the global meltdown.

BSP LIKELY 02

PESO-DOLLAR RATE

Shares close higher

SHARE PRICES YESTERDAY CLOSED 0.7 PERCENT higher amid positive developments in the domestic economy, dealers said.

The composite index gained 14.16 points to 1,984.66 points. The all-shares index rose 0.4 percent to 1,256.58 points.

SHARES 04

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SMC gets 3 seats in Petron

By Elizabeth Sanchez Lacsar

SAN MIGUEL CORP. HAS SECURED three board seats in oil giant Petron Corp. as part of its agreement with British investment fund Asiakom Investment, currently Petron's controlling shareholder, to cede as the food and beverage conglomerate's 50.3-percent stake to the oil firm.

In a disclosure, Petron corporate secretary Lyra Magbanua said the following SMC key executives were elected to the board of Petron effective Jan. 8: Silvi chair, president and CEO Ramon S. Ang; chair and CEO Eduardo M. Cojuangco Jr.; and director Gaudencio Mendoza.

Ang was also named Petron chair and chief executive, replacing Nicolas Alcantara who remains a director of the oil firm.

Cojuangco replaced former Petron director Craig Wehrle, while Mendoza took over the post of Michael T. Dufresne in the board.

Former National Home Mortgage Finance Corp. president Angelino C. Salud was elected independent director. He is, however, not a nominee of SMC.

Petron also said Sidmore nominee and Petron president Eric G. Recto would keep his post in the firm.

SMC nominees announced its seats and Carlos Pagcaliwagan will assume the positions of chief financial officer and general manager in Petron, respectively.

"Shareholders will expect better income, transparency, quality and good governance in Petron," Ang said.

Asiakom Group's Dutch holding firm, Ion Refinery Holdings BV, earlier gave San Miguel the option to acquire from it up to 100 percent interest in a local refinery named SEA Refinery Corp., San Miguel chief financial officer and chief corporate information officer Ferdinand Constantino said in a disclosure.

SEA Refinery owns 30.1 percent of Petron. This includes the 40 percent it bought from state-owned Philippine National Oil Co. for P35.7 billion and around 13 percent that SEA IR transferred to it last month.

Constantino said SMC was given up to two years from Dec. 29, 2008 to exercise its option to buy SEA IR's entire stake in SEA Refinery.

If SMC would opt to take over SEA Refinery, it would gain control of Petron, and the Aboitiz-Soriano group's SEA Pte will retain the 40 percent it bought earlier from Saudi Aramco Overseas Co.

The balance of around 10 percent in Petron is held by the public.

Ford revs up for 2009

By Reena V. Domingo

FORD GROUP PHILIPPINES EXpects continued growth in 2009 despite the gloom in its home market in North America after the company posted increases in domestic sales and exports last year.

FGP president Richard C. Baker said in a briefing that there was a 3.3-percent increase in vehicles sold last year, while shipments of completely built units increased by more than half.

Baker said a total of 7,747 units of Ford and Mazda sedans, pickup trucks and sports utility vehicles were sold in 2008.

Also, the country's new car customer CBU exporters shipped out at least 7,200 units of Ford Focus, Ford Escape, Mazda 3 and Mazda Tribute in Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam.

Since FGP started exporting in 2002, it has shipped a cumulative 50,000 units of CBUs from its plant in Sta. Rosa, Laguna.

"Like Ford Motor Co. globally, FGP experienced a lot of bright spots in 2008, despite all the gloom and doom for the industry that has been a constant in the headlines," Baker said.

He said the Ford's growth in the Philippines was driven by the strong performance of the Ford Escape, Ranger and Everest.

Baker said the Ford Escape posted a 48-percent increase in local sales and became the second best-selling compact SUV.

In turn, Ford Ranger sales went up 23 percent, while that of the Ford Everest "enjoyed its second best-ever sales."

As for Mazda, there was a 37-percent increase in Mazda 3 sales with the launch of a new version.

Overall, FGP's share in the domestic market—which sold 134,649 units in 2008—stands at 6.2 percent or 4.6 percent for Ford and 1.6 percent for Mazda.

"In the Philippines, which has a better timeline, we are reasonably confident and cautiously optimistic that we will be able to compete and be profitable this year," he added.

Exxon to drill one well in Q3

By Abigail L. Ho

AMERICAN OIL MAJOR EXXON MOBIL CORP. is scheduled to start drilling activities in the Sulu Sea before the third or fourth quarter.

Energy Undersecretary Ramon Allan Oca said the US firm had committed to spend between $75 million and $99 million for a deepwater well, which would have a depth of around 600 meters.

The area is under Service Contract 56, in which Exxon has a 50-percent stake. The remaining 50 percent stake is held by Malaysia-based Mitra Energy Ltd.

SC 56 was originally awarded by the Department of Energy to a group composed of BHP Billiton Petroleum Pty Ltd., Australia Hess, Inpex of Sulu Ltd. and Interlink Oil E.

Under the contract, signed in 2005, the group had committed to spend $43.05 million for oil and gas exploration and development over 8,626 hectares offshore the Sulu Sea.

Mitra took over the contract in January 2006, said Exxon in a news press release.

Interest in Philippine oil and gas prospects boomed when the Supreme Court declared the Philippine Mining Act unconstitutional more than four years ago.

BSP likely to slash key policy rates anew

From page B1

"This softening of prices paves the way for another rate cut, which is encouraged by glimmer reprieve in domestic demand in the new year, especially prospects of slower unemployment growth," Global Source said in its latest paper on the Philippine economy.

The BSP's overnight borrowing and lending rates currently stand at 5.5 and 7.5 percent, respectively.

Global Source said BSP Governor Amando Tetangco Jr. himself had already hinted that the central bank was keen on easing its monetary policy.

"In inflation risks, particularly from food and fuel prices, continue to recede, we will carefully consider opportunities for monetary easing, mindful of potential tightening conditions," Global Source quoted Tetangco as saying.

Global Source said the Monetary Board could slash the rates by 25 to 50 basis points, depending on the growth of the economy in the fourth quarter of 2008. The country's gross domestic product in the fourth quarter could be reduced if 2008 will be announced on Jan. 29.

The think tank said the central bank might be forced to cut its key policy rates by as much as 50 basis points if the economy's growth in the fourth quarter of 2008 fell below expectations.

DBS is not buying that the economy grew well above 2 percent in the fourth quarter to meet the full-year growth goal of between 4.5 and 5.0 percent. In the first three quarters of 2008, the economy's average growth was registered at 4.6 percent.

PHILIPPINE ACADEMY OF IMPLANT DENTISTRY HOLDS SECOND SCIENTIFIC SEMINAR

The country's most prestigious and elite association of implant Dentists, the Philippine Academy of Implant Dentistry (PAID), shall host its second Scientific Seminar on January 11, 2009. With the theme, "Recent Trends in Implant Surgery and Prosthetics," the seminar aims to enlighten practicing dentists on the latest global advances of implant dentistry.

Four international resource speakers, all globally renowned for their outstanding technical expertise on varying fields of implant practice, are scheduled to grace the seminar. Dr. Sorith Sinmai, a noted cosmetic dentist in Bangkok, shall discuss "Implant Dentistry moving into New Paradigms." Dr. Lim Kwong Cheung, an internationally-recognized oral surgeon from Hong Kong and concurrent Chairman of the Asian Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons, shall talk about "Advances in Stereomotel Technology and Implant Surgical Navigations" and "Considerations for Peri-Implant Surgery." Dr. Sherwin J. Villareal, a fifth placer in the 2005 Philippine Dentistry Board Exams and a practicing expert in implant dentistry at the Asian Hospital and Medical Center, shall share his views on "Implant Biology and Considerations of Aesthetics Implants." while, Dr. Michael Ong Ah Hup, a Professor of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, shall explain his expertise on "Healing of Bone Substitutes and Hyaluronic Acid" and "Altered Neurosensory Dysfunction Associated with Implant Surgery."

The Philippine Academy of Implant Dentistry conducts quarterly seminars and scientific meetings not only for its members but also to the general dental practitioners. These are done to raise the bar of excellence of each and every professional in terms of their knowledge and skills. Since its inception in 1980, it has remained committed in embodying the highest ideals of the organization by promoting the advancement of implant dentistry throughout the country. Through the promotion of social responsibility and camaraderie among the practicing oral surgeons and dental prosthetologists, the procedures will eventually be made affordable to everyone and this will definitely chart the path for a brighter future for all concerned.

The one-day seminar shall be held at the New Hyatt Hotel and Casino in Pedro Gil Street, Manila from 8:00am to 6:00pm, courtesy of the Philippine Academy of Implant Dentistry, led by its President Dr. Steve Mark G. Gan. Members, delegates and dentists are welcome to participate. Registration starts at 7:30am.

Shares close higher

From page B1

There were 69 gainers and 27 losers, while 47 issues were unchanged. Volume totaled 1.34 billion shares worth P1.35T billion (EGR 30 million).

"Concerns about the US market eased a little bit and in the Philippines, we have had some good developments," said Deogracias Cheng of G. Dee collen.

"The Philippines successfully issued the $1.5-billion bond and that is the government's full year financial requirements. That is going to shield the Philippine peso from potential volatility."

B7

SCIENCE/HEALTH

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Staying healthy this year

By Charles E. Bahar

THE MONTH OF JANUARY symbolizes a new beginning. We usually start by making our New Year's resolutions in which staying healthy should easily top our list.

What better way to follow this than keeping a healthy and balanced diet, regular exercise, as well as getting immunized.

Dr. Lyndon Lee Suy, program manager of OOH National Center for Disease Prevention and Control and member of the Technical Working Group for Influenza Philippines, believes no one should risk the complications of potentially life-threatening illnesses with a vaccine-preventable disease.

"One is never too old to get immunized since it is a lifelong, life-protecting responsibility, he says.

For Lee Suy, the first quarter of the year is an excellent time for Filipinos to contemplate about preparing themselves against the coming onslaughts of the flu season.

The doctor explains that flu is a highly contagious disease, spreading from persons to persons (sometimes people become infected by merely touching something with the flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose).

Best protection

"The flu vaccine is your best protection against flu viruses. However, to be most effective, the vaccine needs to be given two to three months before the start of the flu season, which peaks from July to August (another peak, although lesser, is observed between November and December)," Lee Suy explained.

Both common cold and the flu are caused by viruses, which makes differentiating a cold from the flu by symptoms difficult.

"Many people commonly and incorrectly confuse flu with the common cold. But in general, individuals with the flu get high fever (39°C to 40°C), headache, severe cough, extreme fatigue, aches and pains," describes Dr. Cecilia Montalban, president of the Philippine Society for Microbiology and Infectious Diseases.

Unlike a cold, having a flu can in some cases be dangerous as it may lead to more serious problems.

Complications of flu could include bacterial pneumonia (a significant health threat, particularly for young children and the elderly), ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes.

While antibiotics are very effective against a flu virus, it may be used to treat the complications such as secondary bacterial infections.

Aside from the young children and the elderly, other vulnerable individuals are residents of nursing homes and other facilities, people who suffer from diabetes and those with chronic heart or lung conditions, including asthma.

Young children who come down with the flu—even if they don't have any other health issues—are also likely to end up in an emergency room (a lot of them usually develop higher fever, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea) while others may lead to longer hospitalization.

"This is why a flu shot is also recommended for household members who are always in close contact with young children such as their parents and older brothers and sisters, babysitters and other caregivers," Montalban suggests.

A flu shot generally contains inactive (noninfectious) and killed viruses, the role of which is merely to make the body about the virus (bacteria).

Lee Suy says that components of the vaccine changes each year and usually includes three of the most active viruses prevailing in the hemisphere as identified by the World Health Organization.

Different trend

Lee Suy explains that the Philippines used to have no seasonal pattern in the incidence of flu but, nevertheless, adopted those of the northern hemisphere's timing of vaccination, whether at the start of the "lyo" months.

But results of a five-year flu virus surveillance done from 1998 to 2003 by the Research Institute of Tropical Medicine reveal a different trend—flu peaks in July and August here in the Philippines. This is a trend observed in the southern hemisphere.

"From then on, the Philippines followed the northern hemisphere flu season timing of vaccination which begins in February," Lee Suy says.

The timing of vaccine administration is important as this could help prevent the spread of a possible global flu pandemic.

"We don't want a repeat of the 1918 flu pandemic (commonly referred to as Spanish flu) that spread globally in little over a year and killed at least 50 million people, which is more deaths than World War I or the first years of Bubonic plague outbreak in the Middle Ages," Montalban warns.

It is never too late to include having an annual flu shot as a healthy habit starting this 2009: it's flu shot could save your life or the lives of the ones you care for (or loan's more shots! If's, any way that never hurt to get one).

THE PARI is proclaiming the squash among the dietary stars of Filipino youths.

'Squash' your way to health, better eyesight

By Tess R. Salazar

THE LOWLY KALABASA (SQUASH) MAY have (undeservedly) gained a reputation among elementary pupils as a "turo" because of its shape, that a pupil who gets a failing grade gets a "kalabasa award" of sorts.

But ask the growers, particularly the experts at the Food and Nutrition Research Institute of the Department of Science and Technology. The squash turns out to actually belong to the A-list of super foods—containing pro-vitamin A that can help those fond of consuming it gain better eyesight, healthier hair, smoother and cleaner skin, as well as for better overall growth.

Priority food

This is also the reason the FNRI is promoting the squash among the dietary stars of Filipino youths. FNRI director Mario Capanzana's reply was short and direct. In fact, when Inquirer Health asked him what priority food the agency was promoting as of late.

"Squash" was the FNRI reply in which he added, "we are (also) studying the benefit of green and coconut flour."

The FNRI is promoting squash lately with its recent bagging (no squash involved) of the Department of Education's (DepEd) Search for Outstanding Schools Awards. Its website (http://www.fnri.dost.gov.ph/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1188).

The FNRI stated that squash contains minerals like calcium, phosphorous and iron. It also has carbohydrates, mostly large doses and moderate fiber. Iron is involved in building healthy red blood cells.

The food values of kalabasa...its fruits, flowers and tops—are widely used as vegetables in the country, according to the "Medicinal Fruits and Vegetables" book of Dr. Jolan Z. Esteves Tan and Ms. Rebecca Manuna Galvez Tan. Its young shoots are an excellent source of calcium, phosphorous, iron and Vitamin B. The flowers contain thiamin A and calcium. The fruit is rich in iron, phosphorus, calcium and Vitamin A.

The FNRI guided healthier last year when it pioneered the yellow pan de sal—a roll made from dough that is "10-percent squash puree" instead of 100-percent wheat flour. It unveiled its recipe. Use of the traditional breakfast staple for lunch or merienda that the piece of improved flour would rise by 5 to 10 percent in April 2008.

The vegetable-enriched bread retains the color, shape and texture of the original. The only obvious difference is the color, as it comes out of the oven yellowish rather than brown. It was so though the bread had been dipped in margarine, one panelist observed.

Fortified with Vitamin A

FNRI also noted that the yellow pan de sal comes fortified with Vitamin A, owing to the puree. A 32 gram serving could already provide 16 percent of the Recommended Daily Allowance of Vitamin A and 10 percent of the daily energy requirements of a child aged 7 to 9, the agency said.

If properly processed, the squash-enriched pan de sal can be mass-produced into three pathogenic microorganisms such as E.Coli and salmonella. Under ambient temperature conditions, it can have a shelf life of up to five days.

The FNRI completed its study of squash-enhanced pan de sal in 2007. It has since joined the ranks of the new bread through a bakery in Dasmariñas province.

Travelers' squash enchanted Tuesday even when Baguio offered camote noodles fortified with squash last year. The Silliman Research and Development Center, a non-governmental organization, launched the Angelic Squash Camote Noodles, the very first variety of squash canton to hit the market in Mountain Province and the Cordillera region.

Play the game of life at Manhattan Garden City

With the start of the new season of the Philippine Basketball Association (PBA), it won't be long before its semifinals and championship season once again at the Araneta Coliseum.

Since you're a bona fide basketball enthusiast, why not live within the mecca of basketball as well? As a resident of the Araneta Center's Manhattan Garden City (MGC), not only are you living within a stone's throw away from Big Dome, but you won't have any more worries about crowds in the MRT or even the lack of parking space. And after a big game, you and your friends can head upstairs in your very own basketball court MGC for a pickup game of your own. And practice the moves of your favorite PBA player.

A trellised canopy walkway connects the court to the roof of Manhattan Garden City's 28 varied amenities in its second phase. From Tower 1, you can easily walk to Tower 2 after your invigorating game.

If you're still up for more physical activity, walk over to the back of Tower 3 where you can find the rest of Manhattan Garden City's super amenities. If tennis is more your sport, emulate Roger Federer and practice your strolling serve on the tennis court, which also doubles as a basketball court.

But if you would just like a relaxing break from all the competitive sports, just cool off in the tropical pool, or do laps at the lap pool. Or just relax your tired muscles in the outdoor spa. Indoors, you can shoot pool or play video games in the game room.

As the country's first-ever garden-inspired, transit-oriented community, mobility is part of the overall plan and design of Manhattan Garden City. Its buildings are connected to two existing mass-transit systems—the LRT2 and MRT. So whether you want to go to Quezon City, Makati, Ortigas, or to top amenities such as Rizmo or La Salle, the train station is just a walk away on Manhattan Garden City's 709-meter long garden walkways.

"Whatever room you're renting for, with all the concerts, basketball action and events at the nearby Araneta Coliseum, you'll always be winner when you play the game of life at Manhattan Garden City," noted Megaworld Central Properties Inc. president Anthony Charlemagne Yu. Megaworld Corporation, the country's #1 residential condominiums, developer, is the joint venture partner of the Araneta Group for Manhattan Garden City.

To be a lifetime winner at Manhattan Garden City, please call (02) 3333 or visit the showroom at the 3rd level of Gateway Mall. Or visit www.themanhattangardencity.com

Robinsons launches first-rate, affordable living in Cubao

By Charles E. Bolton

LIVING in Escalades at 20th Avenue would mean residents would no longer have to cross themselves beating traffic.

WHILE MORE AND more homebuyers are being attracted to condominium living—particularly in the mid-range developments—there is one thing that still holds them back from making the move: cost.

However, this will soon change with the announcement of Robinsons Land Corp.'s Housing and Land Development Division (Homes) that a project that is not so close to Quezon City.

Located on 20th Avenue in Cubao, Quezon City (near Aurora Boulevard), its desirable location will not only afford its future residents a much shorter commute in going to their respective school or work," RLC-HLDD Senior Vice President and General Manager Winlfe Alfonso said.

She said Escalades at 20th Avenue (www.escalades-20th-ave.ph) will offer for sale units priced ranging between P1 million and P2.2 million and with floor areas from 30 sq m for a two-bedroom unit to 32 sq m for one-bedroom as well as 23 sq m for a studio unit.

"Anyone could avail of several flexible payment and financing schemes that will even make each unit very affordable," Alfonso says.

She adds that living in Escalades at 20th Avenue would mean its residents would no longer have to stress themselves beating the morning rush or suffering the late afternoon traffic to get to their home. This means they may now with the family for more quality living as one will be able to leave or arrive home more relaxed," Alfonso describes.

Good location

Escalades at 20th Avenue is a five minute journey from major commercial zone and thoroughfares—the Metro Railway Transit (MRT-3), Light Railway Transit (LRT-2), Edsa, C5 and Katipunan.

"And having a home in the middle of Cubao means you are just a stone's throw away from Araneta Center, one of the country's premiere shopping and entertainment hub," she says.

Alfonso explains that the Philippine Board of Investments has granted Robinsons Land incentives for this latest master-planned economic housing community.

"Escalades at 20th Avenue is the result of careful planning in order to make this one of the best choices in its category," she says.

Alfonso says an Asian contemporary concept featuring earth-toned colors and plush resort style have been integrated into the overall look of the development.

For example, the Exotic Birds Courtyard, which is set in the center, will enable the development will have tropical Asian-inspired open garden with landscaping for those who want to have a soothing escape from the hustle and bustle of the city.

"Escalades at 20th Avenue will have its residential buildings with landscaped courtyard and a host of other amenities that appeals to modern way lifestyle like children's playground, jogging path, picnic area with barbecue pits and gazebos," Alfonso says.

Secured, eco-friendly

The property will be fully gated with a perimeter fence to ensure safety and privacy. In addition to having a wide main entrance road, ample parking space, separate pedestrian and vehicular traffic access, among others.

In keeping with the trend toward more eco-friendly development, spacing between buildings has been leveraged to better natural air circulation.

Alfonso says such design will allow more natural lighting, ensuring fewer occasions of lower energy consumption.

"Escalades at 20th Avenue is designed by RLC with its professional design partners, following a method called Green Architecture." This means the building will be constructed to be energy-efficient, allowing more natural sunlight into each unit and free-flowing ventilation system will enable owners added utility expenses in the long run," says Alfonso, adding that future residents will truly enjoy comfortable and easy lifestyle within the busy section of Quezon City.

Megaworld launches Greenbelt project

PHILIPPINE REAL ESTATE Industry trailblazer Megaworld Corp. continues to dominate the condominium on the Greenbelt, Makati town as a bankable area for residential developments in the midst of the crisis as it launches its fifth condominium project within this plush commercial/business area.

The 31-story Greenbelt Madison, rising on Salcedo Street in Legaspi Village, stamps Megaworld's trailblazers on the high-end condominium segment as the company even raised the ante by making all the units fully furnished.

Fully furnished units

Greenbelt and Legaspi Villages, considered as the financial address among the elite circle in the Makati Central Business District, and that will be our strongest selling point for the Greenbelt Madison. With or without a crisis, Greenbelt will remain a high-income area that attracts the most affluent and discerning buyers like a magnet," Megaworld SVP for Marketing and project head Gilbert Lengqui said.

Greenbelt Madison, shaped by modern esthetics, is Megaworld's latest anticipated follow-up to the highly successful Greenbelt Parkplace, Greenbelt Residences, Greenbelt Chancellor Residences, Greenbelt Esperanza and Greenbelt Executive.

Set for groundbreaking within the year and slated for turnover in 2012, Greenbelt Madison will feature 275 executive studio and 2-bedroom units.

The units will be delivered fully furnished with appliances such as Haier 42-inch flat screen TV, Sony home theater system, La Germania cooking range and range hood, Toshiba washer/dryer, Whirlpool microwave oven. The pieces of furniture include a sofa set with throw pillows, dining set, bed frame with mattresses, entertainment cabinet, bedroom closet and kitchen cabinetry.

At the seventh level play area, residents can enjoy their private 13-meter lap pool with jacuzzi pool lounge, indoor spa and gym. It has seven levels of convenience parking spaces, two high-speed interior flat-bed passenger elevators and spacious atrium lobby with exquisite floor patterns in marble and granite.

Security

Megaworld is again putting primary concern in the security of the residents. This is why the Greenbelt Madison will have closed-circuit TV monitoring for selected entrances/exits, intercom security system connecting reception/security counters to all units, security command center for 24-hour monitoring of all building facilities, automatic heat/smoke detection and fire sprinkler system for all units, and automatic water pond with emergency speaker at parking floors.

What makes the address so special is it is surrounded by the office areas of the Makati CBD, posh retail shops, and everything else that will complement the lifestyle of the Philippine elite from restaurants to art galleries, museums and top-caliber graduate education institutions like the Asian Institute of Management.

Thus, Megaworld's main target markets for the Greenbelt Madison are doctors, executives, entrepreneurs and investors.

UNFAZED by the global financial crisis, Megaworld has recently launched its new Makati project, Greenbelt Madison.

Discovering opportunities in 2009

LIVING ARCHITECTURE

Marcelo de Guzman Jr

THE YEAR 2008 WAS GOOD for property developers. It was probably the best of the last 10 years. Sales were brisk and everyone was happy. It did not matter whether the developer was for the lower-, mid-, or high-end markets; they all sold very well.

However, doomsday analysts are painting a rather bleak picture for this new year which is by gone to those just what they are: doomsday analysts living up to their name. There are pointed analysts are so "good" at what they do that they can find a sad scenario even for the very positive things that have happened in the last year.

To them, a drop in oil prices heralds a horrendous deflation in the economy in prices of construction materials translates as ill news for the manufacturers. Nothing escapes their ghoul pickings.

Endless opportunities

I believe there are endless opportunities for everyone in 2009. Although the United States is sunk in a recession, we may not be as severely affected as predicted. Why is that?

For one, we are not as dependent on the American economy as we used to be. There was a time when most of our exports, like decorative handicrafts, accessories and furniture, were geared solely to the US market. Although we suffered when they tightened their import quotas with us, we were encouraged to explore other export possibilities, particularly China. The bright sheen taught us to be independent and not reliant on a single market.

In addition, the negative publicity China has been getting due to the quality of their products gives us an advantage. Knowledge is offers our products as viable alternatives for the property sector, this could mean the establishment of more factories and industrial zones.

Second, we Filipinos are very resilient. We have been immersed in other countries' crises over the past three decades...from dictatorships, to natural calamities, to flailing economies, to carrying levels of coup d'etat...so that we are now considered crisis-ready, if not crisis-wary.

In fact, we are the experts in crisis situations and are sought out by other nations as consultants in dealing with seemingly impossible situations. Similarly we offer skills as planners, designers and builders are ever in demand as foreign clients.

Third, a new wave of forum hotspots now residing in our country. They also could then to see economic growth in the areas of real estate, education, etc. Apparently, the core of living and education in Asian is always, as our country is a good education. If we can make our facilities friendlier for the Japanese and other Asians as well, we may be able to attract even more of them here.

If we can assure them that would protect and prioritize our own citizens, we can make a quantum situation as welcome. Big hint and comfortable partner. Meanwhile, the expansion of housing, commercial and industrial facilities will provide us opportunities for growth.

Our cost of living here is cheaper and arrears serious. Our overseas contract workers cannot work offshore forever; they likewise grow old, get financially settled and desire to return home. We have a market for them. That can translate to a continuing demand for housing from this sector.

Investors are ever on the lookout for more affordable oil investments for rest and recreation. A $1,000 vacation for one in Europe is enough for a family of eight in have tax-free lives in Subic. This points us toward more opportunities to develop properties for this purpose.

Ideal for building

These days, there is a decline in prices of construction materials, making the situation ideal for building. When the construction industry rises up, the economy improves as well since more jobs are created all around.

Our fellow developers have already learned their lessons during the 1997 crisis and are now smart enough not to make the same mistakes twice. They are more careful. They know that as long as they deliver on what they promise, they will be patronized.

One of the failures during the 1996 crisis was that some developers spread themselves too thinly, launching many projects left and right, but were not able to complete these. This made buyers wary of getting in any more of their money from downing down investments.

Positive thinkers

Lately, I seem to find myself in the company of positive thinkers. A client, who just sold his house in Quezon City, recently wanted to build more businesses. He claims to have been surprised by the number of responders in search of homes, scraping to the house when he put it on the market.

A friend in the advertising industry likewise seems to be surprised with the volume of his work prospects for the coming year. He believes this is because the less generated by the US economies prompted businesses to advertise more.

A supplier of construction materials claims to our house expressed a decline in sales. He is confident of the homes free enough to bring his family on holiday abroad.

Another good indicator is that BI continues building new malls and expanding their old ones like there were nearly current country's stores, with one sprouting and sprawling to every corner.

Even call centers, which many feared were on the downward, have bounced back since businesses decided to fight back and bring more of their transactions straight to the consumer by outsourcing more direct marketing calls.

Good deals

These days of investor sentiment mean a done of opportunity for real estate bargain hunters to find good deals for properties owned by Filipino-Americans selling their properties due to the market value to support their lifestyle abroad. How many hands can snatch up 15 properties at great prices.

We still have other ways up our sleeves that have not been fully explored, such as the self-liquidating agri-based development. This is where we have developmental projects which, with proper management, can eventually pay for itself. Property management, refurbishing and conversion of existing buildings are also good ways to further grease our economy.

There is nothing to fear but fear itself. Money does not really disappear; it just moves from one hand to another. In it's just a matter of finding out who has it this time and working smart to cultivate that source.

When I asked a client about a year ago why he was not ready to build despite the current situation, he simply replied, "This is what we do and this is what we do best." Yes, we must continue to do our best and discover the prospects and opportunity to even the most challenging situations.

As I mentioned in the earlier part, I have learned that there's nothing wrong with riding in the rain. You just have to take more carefully and do everything a little more slowly than usual. On the threshold of 2009, I can only quote the song: "The future's so bright, I gotta wear shades!"

For your comments and questions, please e-mail to marcelo.deguzman@yahoo.com.

A hassle-free home and furniture shopping experience

HOUSE SEARCHING AND home/office shopping go hand in hand. It is hard to get one without the other. That is why Federal Land Inc. and Automatic Appliances Inc., two leading companies in their respective fields, have teamed up to unveil a new retail concept—the Federal Land Mall at the Ayala Center in Cebu. The Automatic Superstore store at the Ayala Center in Cebu.

The Federal Land Satellite Showroom recently held its commercial blessing. The launch marked the partnership of Federal Land, the real estate arm of the Pangilinan Group, whose 26 years of experience in property development is unparalleled, and Automatic Appliances, the appliance authority in the country now celebrating its 60th year.

"We're very excited to start this partnership with Automatic Appliances. We believe that we are both guessing for the same thing in providing more affordable living with an affordable budget. We believe that our group and your business complement each other. This model can will allow people to appreciate the value of space and comfort," remarked Federal Land President Alfred Ty during the launch.

Bigger display

The 6,000-square-meter Automatic Superstore is home to the biggest appliances and furniture display in the country, featuring 100 top brands, AAI President Jaime Lim said, "It is not enough to have a showroom. It is having it inside a place where you can roll your items. Every home should be personalized. Here, they will get a vision of what their lifestyle will be. I'm very glad that Federal Land is doing this with us."

The showroom showcases all products of Federal Land, from models of the company's latest offerings—The Grand Midori Makati, Peninsula Garden Mid-town Homes in Pasig, Manila and Mangaldan Residences in Manaldan, City—are also be seen. Likewise, shoppers may also find the ambiance of living in one with the different townhouse model unit of the Excelsior Estate in Mangaldan Residences.

Federal Land and Automatic Appliances have joined forces for a Christmas promotion, for every purchase at Automatic Center, Home and Solo Homes & Offices, shoppers can win a condominium unit at Mangaldan Residences.

The Federal Land Satellite Showroom inside the Automatic Superstore is a one-stop shop guaranteed to make services more integrated and customer-friendly.

Edito Cesar D. Mangaoang

PROPERTY

ARTIST'S rendition of covered pool

ARTIST'S rendition of hotel room

ARTIST'S rendition of the outside pool

G&W offers deluxe hotel to individual investors

By Cesar D. Mangaoang

WHAT USED TO be kept by the developers for themselves are now being offered by architects to individual investors on the open market. These are self-liquidating properties that are earning high returns.

According to G&W Architects Chair Gilbert Yu, in the Philippines individual investors are being made to believe that it is in the housing sector where the best high-yielding investments products are. "They are never given the opportunity to own performance investment grade properties like malls, hotels, retail storefronts, airports, industrial parks and BPO (business process outsourcing) corporate buildings," he says.

The older Yu explains that investment grade properties generate much higher profits and are able to attract a return that would be more in line with the goal of the property investor. He says they are the most ideal avenue in investing. Investment grade properties are also where most investors in the financial market shift to as they look for something more tangible and less volatile than financial securities.

With this in mind, leading architectural and project development consultancy firm said project initiators G&W Architects is now offering individually a chance to own a deluxe hotel accommodation at the corner of 32nd Street and 11th Avenue near Bonifacio High Street in Bonifacio Global City.

P1.5B hotel

To cost about P1.5 billion, Head of Marketing Gilbert Yu says the hotel, which is initially known as "The Majestic," will have 32 stories and 285 rooms. Construction of the hotel starts in October this year and will be completed in the fourth quarter of 2012. Occupancy rate is expected at 75-80 percent.

According to Gilbert, G&W is targeting a bigger market which consists of conservative investors, those who are already homeowners with savings and foreign real estate fund fund since the return on investments is high. It is eyeing only 100 individuals to be part of the hotel.

"Investors can own several units. They can sell the units once they get the units' titles. The minimum amount an individual investor can shell out is P5.3 million which is deposited in a trustee bank within four years," Gilbert says.

The property will be managed by a reputable hotel chain, guaranteeing an attractive return of investment. Hotel investors like food and beverage, gaming fees, as well as health club fees will be shared by the unit owners.

Gilbert laments that the Real Estate Investment Trust law is still under review in Congress while in developed countries the individual's ability to own investment grade products is made possible by the REIT.

Among G&W's latest projects are residential condo Crescent Park Residences and the Grand Hampton Tower which will have in-order turnover this month.

Revolutionize scene

"As chair of G&W Architects, we seek to open ourselves to investors a system to help regurgitate the housing market and the investment market. The build-to-own system for years has provided home makers, through the direct investor and direct cost system properties that are significantly more affordable with unparalleled quality," Gilbert says.

According to him, G&W Architects has shared the build-to-own system to many industry professionals, and he is proud to say that others are following suit. Mafiosa and Partners and DMCI Homes also practice a similar system by gathering clients and charging reasonable professional fees, he adds.

"Today I urge the industry professionals to revolutionize unless the industry and start providing investment grade projects as to individual investors using the same advantages of the build-to-own direct cost system. That will elevate the industry to further heights to provide a solution to individuals who have invested in commercial paper and securities, suffering from the financial meltdown, a better alternative through investment grade properties that are more secured and rewarding," Gilbert stressed.

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GLOBE ASIATIQUE

IN THIS ISSUE
■ Thesis tips for cramming students

super LIFESTYLE

How the Nintendo DS Lite killed my social life

I have dishes to cook, cakes to serve, mysteries to solve and princesses to save – all with my very powerful pink stylus

By Pam Pastor

CHRISTMAS EVE AT 3:00 back of an SUV. My friends and I had decided to drive to Tagaytay for dinner. While our car braved through the traffic, my friends were laughing and shrieking about ABS exploits with someone who had a very inappropriate planning. It was a fun conversation, one I would have otherwise joined, but I was too busy beaming how to make tokwapit with Cooking Mama.

Welcome to the world of a Nintendo DS Lite addict.

My new mistress away from the restaurant when my DS Lite's battery died. "Damn it!" I cursed. I dug through my bag and realized in horror that I left behind my charger's adapter at home. My mother's reminder: "Friends – needless with, need no and one adapter, please." But they didn't have an adapter.

Experiencing heavy withdrawal symptoms, I played Dr. Mario on a borrowed PSP until the final credits).

Beginning of an obsession

The day I got my cool pink DS Lite, I immediately logged into iTunes and started looking up accessories. I was going my unit. Within minutes, I had ordered a stylus set in #2 different colors and a soft carry case – pink, of course. The next day, I also ordered what an iPod seller described as a "Cute Pink Protective Soft Cloth Pouch." In my

(CONTINUED ON C2)

A weekly directory of the country's best establishments

Where to Stop Where to Go

Kung Hei Fat Choi at the Manila Pavilion

THE CHINESE NEW YEAR IS not only for the shindig eyed but for those who desire an abundance of success and good fortune. The Waterfront Pavilion Hotel and Casino has prepared treats and activities that will surely depict prosperity and culture in the Year of the Earth Ox with astounding flair.

Shrimp Garden, the Pavilion's Malaysian Cantonese fine dining restaurant, is proud to launch its own version of the Yee Sang, a unique Malaysian dish that is said to attract wealth and prosperity. A delectable combination of tuberous root and green fruits and vegetables, delicately flavored with choice spices and paired with tender fish and crisp fine crackers, this light yet flavorful course is bound to set off the New Year on an optimistic note. The Yee Sang will be available from Jan. 15 to 31.

To further make this reunion feast special, the Pavilion will entertain guests with the traditional dragon dance on Jan. 26, the first day of the Chinese New Year. The presentation, which will start at 6 p.m., will have the fabled Dragon parading along the lobby and the corridors of the hotel to bring good luck to all patrons and those merry-ery bad spirits that may be present.

For inquiries and reservations, please call the Waterfront Pavilion Hotel and Casino at (632)526-1112 local 2303 or visit the website at www.waterfrontmanila.com.

Century Park Hotel celebrates the Chinese New Year

GATHER FAMILY AND FRIENDS AND ENJOY a week-long host of festive activities as Century Park Hotel welcomes the most anticipated 2008 Year of the Ox! Drop by the Deli booth from Jan. 26 to 31 and bring home or surprise your loved ones with a delightful Chinese New Year favorite — dim sikes. This sticky glutinous cake made of ground rice is believed to enhance family togetherness all the more during the year. Chocolate and fruity charms are also available, a perfect symbol of thoughtful gift for the New Year. Where the kids-off on Jan. 26 starting at 7 a.m., with a lively lion and dragon dance and ear-shifting ceremony for luck and prosperity. Then head to Cuillon de Paris and discover the richness and diversity of modern Chinese cuisine in a lavish buffet. Jan. 26 - adult rate for dinner is P1,300 per head while kids are only P750. Jan. 28 - lunch and dinner rate for adults is also P1,300. Add only P175 net and enjoy bottomless wine and beer of your choice. To add a personal touch to the celebration, Philippine Institute of Baking City will stay Chinese visuals in the opulent ambience of Almost Lounge on the eve of Jan. 26. Get into the exciting spirit with UP Pep. Newsboy Ronald Eugenio is on the scene interesting Chinese and Japanese fare. Your sendoff from Jan. 29 to 31. To make the celebrations truly unique, Century Park Hotel is exclusively bringing in China's long history of arts and traditional crafts—with dexterous artists from hometown China. For reservations, call 528-0837 or 526-8888 or log on to www.centurypark.com.

Pan Pacific Manila welcomes the new year

A CRESCENDO OF CONFETTI STOP QUESTIONS BURSTS OF THE Pan Pacific Manila from celebrating and welcoming the New Year with a blast as "Countdown to 2008". The Pacific Lounge, located at the 21st floor of the hotel was the perfect venue with its floor to ceiling glass walls that provided exquisite views of the city lights and the fireworks display even on the rainy hours of the night. Elgin Luminarias serenaded guests with favorite and classic piano pieces while guests enjoyed the lavish international buffet. Kathy Manuel, marketing communications manager and Vic Lacap, F&B manager, handpicked the award-winning culinary delights of the night—cooked books from Pinaembodo, F&B gift certificates at the Pacific Lounge, a 30-Drinks at the Head Start Head Resort, an overnight stay in a renovated room with breakfast for two and a 30-Drinks stay at the Executive Suite of the Pan Pacific Manila. The night also featured the all male classical pop band group, Prime. The soulful voices of Jun Jones, James Uy and Noel Tena filled the corners of the Pacific Lounge with popular and romantic songs reminiscent of the 70s. Guests can indulge in watching the Chinese fireworks display at the hotel's lobby while enjoying some to welcome the New Year. Pan Pacific Manila is the first and finest luxury hotel in Ermita/Malate offering personalized butler service. For more information, call 524-4700 or visit pacificmanila.com and ask for the Butler of course!

Food promotions at Mandarin Oriental's Tin Hau

TIN HAU, MANDARIN ORIENTAL, MANILA'S Asian fusion Chinese restaurant, presents two tempting treats for discriminating diners in the month of January. The Schezhuan Cantonese promotion and the Peking Duck promotion. From Jan. 01 to 15, chef Henrique Chan brings the best of the Szechuan region's cuisine to your plate, with treats from a special a la carte menu such as sizzling crispy rice cake with shrimps in tomato sauce and camphor and tea smoked duck served with pancake, steamed bun with shredded spring onion, pork, Shanghai style stir fried fillet of pink garoupa with rice cake and vegetables in beef sauce and stir fried set with dried chili and peppercorn, Szechuan style. Peking duck lovers will delight in Tin Hau's treat from Jan. 19 to 25 as the delectable dish becomes the piece de resistance. A reminder of it paying diners at Tin Hau are entitled to a 50 percent discount on a Peking Duck, roasted in a variety of ways. For dining in only. For details call Tin Hau at 750-8888.

A.VENUE HOTEL SUITES MODEL EMPLOYEE OF THE LAST QUARTER 2008

A.Venue Hotel Suites' housekeeping senior room attendant Florean Dullam is awarded Model Employee of the Last Quarter 1998 by hotel manager Jose Antonio C. Ribaya. Proudly witnessing the event are guest feedback and communication chair Ramon Tiaz, executive housekeeper Flora Caroline and human resources manager Daniel Bugayong. The brand-new A.Venue Hotel Suites located at Makati Ave., Makati City is managed by General Hotels and Resorts Incorporated.

Financial Plaza Directory

How the Nintendo DS Lite killed my social life

From page 61

hunter to render the purchase, I didn't even realize that the seller refuses to ship to the Philippines. I had to hop a friend in Singapore to receive the package for me and bring it home to Manila.

After Ging, I went to Amazon.com to check out the best-selling DS games. I used it as the basis for what has turned into a very long wish list of new DS Lite games.

More than that, I'm okay with my DS Lite beside me practically every night.

The day after our trip to Tagaytay, we went to a friend's house for a party. People were sitting around her garden, downing bottle after bottle of beer and smacking the hot, dog-shit mess being grilled.

Where was I? Sitting in a corner, once again chopping vegetables with Cooking Mama.

Anti-social

"You're such an anti-social!" some people complained. I grinned sheepishly but my eyes remained glued to my virtual restaurant.

A few days after, I met up with a friend and his new boyfriend at Greenbelt. I hadn't seen him in weeks and the first thing I said was how much the DS Lite rocks. I'm the envy because he's a PSP fanatic.

But all I had to do was setup out my unit and show him Ramos, my adorable Nintendog, and all of a sudden, he wanted his own DS Lite, too. "Say cute!" he said. Which is probably why he didn't mind that I spent a huge chunk of dinner petting my Labrador and taking him for a walk.

At my brother's birthday bash, I ate quickly and spent the rest of the time cooking more dishes with Cooking Mama. "What are you doing?" my mom's uncle asked.

"Playing," I said.

"Oh, I thought you were petting makeup on. Bata nagtatrabaho ako kahit ang sagal," he said. I laughed and swiped the stylus across my eyelid, pretending to apply eye shadow.

Resisting the urge

I arrived at an friend's birthday party early and spent the first hour playing games while lamenting to her catch-up with her college buddies.

A few days before that, four of us went to Tom Yum for a first massage and I honestly thought I could play Mystery Case Files: Millionaire Affair even being kneaded. Realizing how dark it was inside the massage room and how the other people being massaged still probably want to kill me if the light interrupted their relaxation, I resisted the urge to bring it out. It was not easy, not at all.

Just a couple of days ago, while dining at Starbucks, I half-listened to friends laughing about this thing and that thing, my silence only punctuated by angry cursing every single time Rhoda died. They've got me used to it now.

Cab drivers who like to open their mouths as they're making small talk have hit a dead wall with me. I am not a big fan of discussing politics and how much the government sucks—especially not when Grimoire has just given me a new case to solve with Catherine.

I suffer for making small talk but a dead wall with me. I am not a big fan of discussing politics and how much the government sucks—especially not when Grimoire has just given me a new case to solve with Catherine.

I suffer for making small talk but a dead wall with me. I am not a big fan of discussing politics and how much the government sucks—especially not when Grimoire has just given me a new case to solve with Catherine.

Cab drivers who like to open their mouths as they're making small talk have hit

Thesis tips for cramming students

It's an academic ritual that forces you to grow up

By Bianca Consunji

SO IT'S YOUR LAST SEMESTER IN college. You've struggled through killer math exams, memorized names and dates for history quizzes, and embarrassed yourself in front of your friends when you goofed up during a class presentation. As a senior, you giggled at the sea-physics applying for your org, and figured out the cheapest food spots in the campus.

Graduation is so near, you can almost taste it. Save for a few minor hassles of classes, nothing can stand between you and your diploma...except for your thesis, that is.

The undergraduate thesis is an academic hurdle that countless students underestimate or take for granted. Many don't graduate on time (or fail to graduate at all) because of it. If you still haven't done an issue 101 presentation of your thesis so you could duly, theorem-ize, you might not be able to turn it in at all unless you take drastic action.

What's a crammer to do? Here's 2007's positive turning in a good thesis...in time.

1 **Cut down on your extracurricular activities.** So you're the president of your org and an active drama volunteer. While it's true that non-academic activities will boost your resume and expand your network, you have to cut down on your other commitments so you can prioritize your thesis. Avoid hanging out at your org tambayan and sacrifice mall weekends. Explain to your organizers that you're not ditching them, but really need the time to work on your interviews and thesis.

2 **Transcribe interviews in your free time.** Bring the iPod and start transcribing—the longer you put off transcribing, the more you won't be able to work on the body of the text. Interviews may provide you with nuggets of information that you still have to double-check through other forms of research (and take a lot of time), so do them early.

3 **Consult with your advisor frequently.** Some students put off consultations, hoping that their advisers won't have as much time to vet through all the information. Chances are, your adviser (if he/she is a good one) won't just wave away glaring errors and inconsistencies and may make you start from scratch if he/she is dissatisfied with the final product. Prevent last-minute changes and make sure that you avoid contradictions all the time. That way, you also end up with work that you can be proud of, not just something cobbled together hastily.

4 **Don't rely on coffee and energy drinks.** The occasional all-nighter isn't bad, but if most of your thesis work seems to be in a bleary-eyed state, you'll end up typing down disjointed thoughts and sentence-bound sentences. As much as possible, do the bulk of your work in the daytime to avoid relying on caffeine to keep you up. Save the all-nighter for doing a rush (but doesn't require a lot of active thinking, like researching or being sumpter (or editing) if you're working on a film or multimedia thesis).

5 **Backup, backup, backup.** Save your files obsessively. If you're working from your own desktop or laptop, make sure that you backup on an external hard drive or CD. If you work from a public computer, make sure that the files are properly saved on your thumb drive—and save in multiple storage areas, because if you lose the USB that contains your entire thesis, you're done for.

6 **Ask for help.** Of course, it's one thing to ask someone else to write your thesis, but it's not a bad thing to get a helping hand when you need it. Ask a friend to help you make charts, transcribe texts if you lend the pencil, or just motivate you when you're feeling lazy. Dip your toes/ends to make sure that you're getting in touch information as you need...social networking sites can be a great source of information.

7 **Work in a private place.** Sometimes, you really need to get away from it all—distractions like free internet, interference from well-meaning family and friends, and plenty of food can prevent you from working at your optimum level. Spend a couple of hours every day in places that give you no choice but to work: the library, an air-conditioned classroom, a quiet coffee shop.

8 **Make a checklist.** Write down a list of to-do things, and set deadlines. Not to worry, promise to finish the index before you polish your review of related literature, or check all the footnotes before you work on the charts. Doing a checklist of different areas helps you organize things better; that way you won't be scrambling to see what you have or haven't done already.

E-mail the author at bianca.consunji@yahoo.com.

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Hello Kitty Live in Manila

The Crowd Waiting for their turn with Hello Kitty

Last November 30, 2008 - December 1, 2008, Hello Kitty was live in Manila to be a part of the event "Stand a Portion" Day with Hello Kitty" at the SM Mega Mall Atrium.

It was a fun-filled two day event in support local Islamic Livelihood. Lucky fans were able to take their photos with their favorite Hello Kitty dressed-up costumes, get photo printing, view of Fuji Films, Hello from their theme areas a lot of fun activities such as nail painting, bubble, salon and face painting.

To those who came and took part in the fun - thank you! And for those who weren't able to make it, come visit our Hello Kitty booth at the exhibit area of SM Mega Mall A from December 17-23, 2008. There will be more Santa's fun at 2008 that you can come and be apart of - so watch out for it.

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IN THIS ISSUE
Sour notes struck in stellar 'true confessions' /D3

Editor Nestor U. Torre ● Assistant Editor Rito P. Avila

SATURDAY Special

NOW SHOWING

Love defies time in Pitt-Blanchett starrer

By Rito P. Avila

"The Curious Case of Benjamin Button"
D: David Fincher
S: Brad Pitt, Cate Blanchett

IT'S SUCH A RELIEF TO WATCH truly substantial, well-made films after December's cinematic deluges. This week and next, tabloid darlings, Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, are giving their fans something to chew about. For while Mr. Pitt toplines both David Fincher's "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button," which his glorious future half-brother-in-law the now-noble-story of Christine Collins in Clint Eastwood's gripping missing-child drama, "The Changeling" (which opens next week).

PITT AND BLANCHETT. Complete portrayals.

Premise

The premise of Fincher's latest movie—adapted from F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1920s short story—is a fascinating one: who wouldn't like the celebrated director tells his tale so engagingly that it's difficult not to get drawn in to Button's bizarre, metaphorical beauty, magical-whimsy and tempting romance. Indeed, everything is key.

The journey of Benjamin Button (Pitt) begins at the end of World War One, in 1918. Benjamin's dying mother delivers him as the last bullets of the cruel war are fired. In everyone's shock, this particular newcomer is born "in his 80s": He's almost blind from cataracts, while his frail body struggles with arthritis. Moreover, he looks like an octogenarian—wrinkly face, sagging skin and all.

After his distraught, horrified father leaves Benjamin in a nursing home, the hospice's kind-hearted, black caretaker, Queenie (Taraji P. Henson), raises the strange-looking child as her own and teaches him about love, family and loyalty. Benjamin's life gets a heavier dose of unfamiliar when he meets the love of his life, Daisy Fuller (Cate Blanchett), their friendship-cum-love story centers on Benjamin ages in reverse.

To tell his protagonists' nine-decade-long story, director Fincher shifts from one section to another, to and forward then together by showing the elderly Daisy on her deathbed in a New Orleans hospital in 2000, as the dearly ill-intricate Katrina approaches. In well-staged scenes that will take viewers' breath away, a secret unfolds as Daisy's daughter, Caroline (Julia Ormond), reads Benjamin's memoirs to her dying mom.

On paper, Benjamin and Daisy's romance feels like a convoluted and complicated fantasy about two unlikely individuals whose love for each other defies age and mortality. But, unlike many cinematic fairy tales, Fincher's film avoids schmaltz, overdone and convoluted melodramatic solemnity. As a result, the emotions the director and his protagonists find themselves in feel more real and relatable to viewers.

Starring high thespic marks are Pitt, Blanchett and Henson for Benjamin's adoptive mother, who deserve Oscar nods for their affectingly complex portrayals. Of late, Pitt has been serving us impressively diverse, spot-on performances—from his Weaver Bird eye-winking dramatic turn in underrated Jesse James" to his outstanding sarcastic comedic portrayals in the Coen brothers' "Burn After Reading." Here, he conveys love, longing and loneliness without much dialogue.

Reassuring presence

But, it's Blanchett and Henson who impress the most in the latter's able hands. Queenie's reassuring presence is like a soothing balm to the dark and painful episodes of her beloved ward's life.

For her part, Blanchett makes even her character's flaws work for her. She makes you understand why despite Daisy's shortcomings, Benjamin remains head-over-heels in love with her.

Even more impressively, as the story progresses, the skilled actress manages to seamlessly string together the different portions of her character's journey with subtle grace, sans flashy histrionics. And, when Daisy gets in her 60s, Blanchett totally vanishes into her character, and demonstrates the depth and magnitude of her ability as an actress.

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Two more 'Cory' performances, Jan. 16-17

"CORY," THE ACCLAIMED MUSICAL on former president Corazon C. Aquino, will have repeat performances on Jan. 16 and 17 at Meralco Theater. The hit production republic Amy Alvarez as Cory, Sherwin Sacro, Robert Seña, Micky Marquez, Tommy Abuel, Lou Veloso, Andy Bais and Rita Avila. Produced and directed by Nestor U. Torre, music by Bing Pimentel, lyrics by Torre, Pimentel and Noelette Sario, musical direction by Lou Quintero, production design by Alex Diviera, lights by Martin Aurora and choreography by Nino Avila.

"Cory" is presented by Bishop Soccio Aerie Foundation and Sun Miguel Corp., with premiere sponsors, PLDT-Smart Promilitar, ABS-CBN, Sen. Manny and Rep. Cynthia Villar and Mayor Al Fedro Lim, and major sponsors, Secretar, Meralco, Philippine Daily Inquirer, National Bookstore, Divi Bridal Pop, Radio Philippines Network and Business Mirror. For tickets, call TicketWorld at 891-9999.

MONTAGE

New treats on Nickelodeon

Last Jan. 1, "Dora the Explorer: Dance to the Rescue" premiered on the Nickelodeon channel at 9 a.m., followed by "Team Galaxy: Predator Plants Exist, Outer Space" and "Edgar & Ellen's Back to School Special: Accept No Substitutes." Jan. 7 at 6 p.m., "Back at the Barnyard" debuted on young viewers.

On Jan. 10 at 9 p.m., usher in the new Lunar year with the latest addition to Nick Jr.: Say hello to "Ni Hao, Kai Lan," which tells the story of Kai Lan Chow, a Chinese-American preschooler and her pets, Rintoo (a tiger), Tolee (koala) and Fluto (monkey). At 11:30 a.m., also catch the "Groundhog TV Movie Special: Allows But Deadly" at 11 p.m., the "Dora 10!" movie special, "Goodbye, Zoey," and "Avatar: The Legend of Aang" at 5:30 p.m.

Sun Shop Express branches

Sun Cellular recently opened 11 more Sun Shop Express branches in Batangas City, Bacoor, San Fernando City, La Union, Dumaguete City, Tacloban City, Tagbilaran City, Roxas City, Iloilo, Bacolod City, Bacolod City and Tagum City. Residents of these areas can now enjoy 24/7 Call and Text Unlimited service by subscribing to Sun Cellular's postpaid plans, like the Group Plus 999 that offers three phones and three lines. Call 352 395-8888, or email the-sunshop@digitel.ph

Movies on TV

On HBO today at 9 p.m., "Blood Diamond." Tomorrow at 9 a.m., "Snapshots." Jan. 12 at 11 a.m., "Some Kind of Wonderful." Jan. 13 at 9 a.m., "Happy Feet." Jan. 14 at 1 p.m., "Guarding Tess." Jan. 15 at 5 p.m., "Uncle Wanno." Jan. 16 at 7 p.m., "Brian Mosher's Dracula."

On Cinemax today at 7 a.m., "True Crime." Tomorrow at 3 p.m., "Red Planet." Jan. 11 at 7 a.m., "To Sir with Love." Jan. 13 at 7 a.m., "The Story Peddler." Jan. 14 at 7 a.m., "The Story Peddler." Jan. 15 at 7 a.m., "The Collector." Jan. 16 at 7 a.m., "Cape Fear."

ALIVE! Regine challenging role in acclaimed musical at Meralco Theater.

Sour notes struck in stellar 'true confessions'

By Nestor U. Torre

HALLI. Ethical lapse.

DR. HAYDEN KHO went on TV recently to explain the breakup of his "May-December" affair with Nicki Belo. Instead of getting some relief or sympathy, however, the Manila needle-dog himself lost an even deeper hole.

It was OK for him or even up to occasional acts of unfeeling and to apologize to his lady love with all his heart. But, it was not OK for him to schmulp his "Bing" (Kareton Halli). It's the woman in a relationship, no matter how brief or shallow, who's allowed to cause her paramour, guys are not supposed to "kiss and tell," at least, not in public—and definitely not on TV.

Admission

Kho's second lame was his admission that the breakup with Nicki had affected him so much that he had tried to hasten his departure from this vale of tears. Never mind that the attempt was just a cry for help or forgiveness—the depressed doctor's revelation turned off many viewers, precisely because he was a doctor. Physicians are supposed to do their best to save lives, so any talk of self-destruction impedes easure be condemned.

As if Kho wasn't bad enough, Kareton Halili came up with his own story story when she finally went public with her side of the story. He, the admitted, he did have a brief affair—but, she had already realized the error of her ways and had learned from it, so people shouldn't pass judgment on her.

Oops, went a minute. Kareton's "confession" also came off badly, because she was taking no necessary risks for herself. Her "role" was to make her confession and ask for forgiveness and understanding for her ethical lapse. It was the public's role to do the forgiving and understanding.

So, for Kareton to say that people shouldn't judge her was one step too quick. That could have come to her from, but with Kareton's peremptory statement, that's less than likely.

Off-the-cuff reactions

Public figures like Hayden and Kareton should realize that televised "confessions" cannot be off-the-cuff reactions and remarks, and must be carefully planned to make sure that no sore notes are struck.

Particularly when the "issue" is controversial and volatile, either protagonists and antagonists have to keep reminding themselves that a declaration or revelation can either succeed or fail depending on their judicious choice of words.

Sometimes, even a single word can mean the difference between emerging from a stressful unwilling like roses...and standing a total success that no amount of PR put-lavery can cover-up.

Merry couple

MARK CASTILLO AND MIA CABRAL spooked it up during an audio-visual presentation in preparations for their Feb. 7 wedding, which will be held at the chapel of St. Peregrine at UP Baguio to follow at Splash Mountain in Los Baños. The images I made for the couple were inspired by Norman Rockwell, my idol in visual arts.

Mia's mom, Lea, is the sister of my dear friend from high school, Dra. Pagkalinawan-Reyes, who now works as an executive secretary at BOI. Lea and her husband, Hermie Cabral, have recently retired from their jobs as a teacher and banker, respectively.)

Values

The bride and groom have known each other for 17 years. They first met at UP Integrated High School in Los Baños, but only "noticed" each other in their post college years when they discovered that they shared the same values and goals. They both loved music, books and films, but their different preferences have allowed them to learn from each other. They have realized that the reason why they lasted as sweethearts was the fact that they laughed a lot together.

At UP Los Baños, Mark finished a degree in Agribusiness Management, while Mia finished Development Communication. They're now producers at UPLB, where Mark teaches marketing and management courses, while Mia is connected with UPLB's science communication department. Mark's parents, Dr. Antonio A.A. Castillo and Prof. Imelda Villa A. Castillo, are also professors in UPLB's College of Forestry.)

The couple looks forward to a happy and productive life together. Best wishes!

• • •

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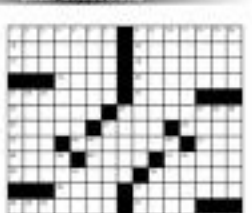

By Tom Pruze
Chicago S.

Friday's Puzzle Solved

HOROSCOPE

BY FRANCES DRAKE

CONCEPTIS SU DOKU

Conceptis Sudoku By Dave Green

			2		1			
	7						9	
		1		4		3		
7				8				1
		8	1	5	6	7		
2				3				8
		6		7		5		
	4						3	
			9		3			

Difficulty Level ★★★★

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Answer to previous puzzle

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8	6	1	3	4	9	5	7	2
3	2	4	7	6	5	8	1	9
1	3	8	6	9	4	7	2	5
4	9	7	2	5	3	1	6	8
6	5	2	8	1	7	4	9	3
7	1	6	5	3	2	9	8	4
9	8	3	4	7	1	6	5	7
2	4	5	9	8	6	2	3	1

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	3 SPIRIT	4 AND TAKING ING NYONG LAING	5 TRANSPORTER 3		
AYALA CENTER CEBU	1 THE CURIOUS CASE OF BENJAMIN BUTTON	2 BEDTIME STORIES	3 TRANSPORTER 3	4 SPIRIT	
MARKET! MARKET!	1 TRANSPORTER 3	2 AND TAKING ING NYONG LAING			
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TRINOMA	1 AND TAKING ING NYONG LAING	2 PAUL BLART	3 SPIRIT	4 TRANSPORTER 3	
	5 RAMBO: BATTLE IN BURMA	6 BEDTIME STORIES	7 THE CURIOUS CASE OF BENJAMIN BUTTON		

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Mickey Rourke wrestles with his demons

LOS ANGELES—"AS SOON AS I drink water," Mickey Rourke paused before answering our question—why was he relieved when, at first, his role in Darren Aronofsky's "The Wrestler," which has won him acclaim and a successful comeback status, was taken away from him and given to Nicolas Cage?

Mickey explained, "I'm a little nervous today. Oh God. Knock on wood. Knock on wood. I'm nervous because I'm finished" after years of bad behavior and decisions, was vying to make sure he didn't botch this moment. Since his film, "The Wrestler," premiered to a Golden Lion Award triumph at the Venice Film Festival, Mickey is up again from the depths.

How I needed to take for the ones who were regarded in the 50s at the level Marlon Brando or Robert De Niro to get back on track? Before "The Wrestler" came up, Rourke was reported to relying on $200-weekly handouts from a friend.

Roller-coaster ride

So, it was understandable to see Mickey choking up several times as he talked about the (physically and emotionally) bruising roller-coaster ride of his life and career during this interview.

At "The Wrestler" for which Mickey is in contention for the Best Actor Drama Award in the Golden Globe Awards this Sunday in LA (Monday morning, Manila time), his fortuned face serves his role well as The Ram, an aging, problematic wrestler at the twilight of his career.

His answers to our questions "When I read the script, and when I met Darren, he reminded me of Dennis and Coppola, whom I've a lot of respect for. I knew why Darren wanted me to do the role. Darren he would demand everything inside of me, which connects for me, as an actor, to create some very dark and painful places."

The 53-year-old actor added, "Also, I knew that I'd have to put on 30 pounds of muscle. These wrestlers are really big. So, I hired an ex-Israeli commando

ONLY IN HOLLYWOOD

Robert V. Arguelles

ROURKE (above and below) on gaining a second chance: "They put me in a box on (TV on) dead when I am still breathing...I don't want to go back to that dark place for the rest of my life, because this is my last chance."

soldier who was very strict with me. I needed somebody like him."

Those challenges made Mickey feel somewhat relieved when the pressure to have a more bankable and reliable star scrutinized the switch, from him to Nicolas Cage. However, Darren insisted to get the original actor back when he stated down the film's budget.

The former boxer was asked to absorb the rustic world of pro wrestling. "Darren made me go to wrestling practice for three months, so I would be with the wrestlers and learn how to wrestle. Wrestling was a sport I didn't know about.

"In this movie, because wrestling is pre-choreographed, I didn't think I would get any injuries," Mickey shared. "I thought it was like Miss, after the first week, I had my first MRI, because I got some big injury, shit flu, pick me up and I threw me across the room."

Both Mickey and Darren (in separate interviews) confessed how surprised they were that their "small film" made such waves in the festival on the Lido. "We didn't expect the reception we got in Venice," Mickey admitted. "This movie has a $5.5-million budget. Because of the boat budget, Darren decided to shoot that with a handheld camera. It was like we didn't stop working."

But, Mickey was glad to be working again. He shot the 1990s as the seven-period in his career. "At the same time, I'm only here today because of what happened in the '90s. I fell so low that I had to quit help. I'm still embarrassed to say that I had to see a therapist for many years and I took really hard to find out what made me short circuit."

Taking a deep breath, Mickey declared in his home voice, "I've found a few things in my life...my grandmother, brother, dog, ex-wife (Carrie Otis, his connection to Mikki Orchids), boxing and, recently, acting again. I got to a point where I couldn't do acting anymore. It wasn't about the losing respect of the desire to act. There were just too many things in my life that were broken that I didn't know how to fix. So, I blamed it on acting, on this or that."

Slow process

He admitted, "I underlearned terribly the first 15 or so years of my career. I put myself on the bench, and it took many years to understand why I self-destructed. I didn't even know myself enough to work with somebody who explained what was going on with me. The comeback has been a slow process, not just with work, but with my own change that I had to make. Change was very hard. I still have to work on it."

Adding to Mickey's woes are his injuries when he was a boxer. "I'm deaf in one ear," he disclosed. "Because of boxing, I can't do anything else with my hands, but I can fix with that, because I don't need to hear (laughter)."

All of Mickey's psychological and physical challenges in real life somehow finds common thread with his feeling character in "The Wrestler," making the speech that he delivers as The Ram toward the film's conclusion resonate with pathos.

"It was Darren who gave me the leeway to go to something," Mickey explained. "There wasn't a speech at the time. But, we thought that a speech was called for. So, what I did was take different parallels of my life—there's that last time when you're up there, or that time you're not summed up on a poster or guitar solo...or and people want to say you're over, but you're still breathing. Or, then put me in a box, as if I'm dead even when I am still breathing...I don't want to go back to that dark place for the rest of my life, because this is my last chance."

Of his union with Gierl, a marriage ended by his wild ways, charges of spousal assault against him, which were eventually dropped, and her reported heroin addiction, Mickey said, "I was married for 13 years. My wife took off—she had to take off. I wished a long time for her to come back. I'm also here today because she never came back. Because people said, 'He's over, finished, down and out. It's all over for him.' A producer said to somebody 'Yes, he was a great actor, but he shot off all his toes.' He knew nobody because of people like her who said, 'You're finished.' The only one who's going to say when I'm finished is me, just like in the speech that I make at the end of this movie."

Mickey quipped with a rueful grin, "I still have some things to close."

E-mail rvarguelles_ABS@yahoo.com, and read his blog, "The Hipster Report," at http://blog.inquirer.net/hipsterreport

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